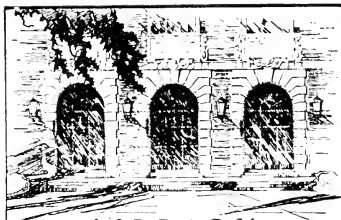


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RED RYVINGTON

BY

WILLIAM WESTALL,

AUTHOR OF

“LARRY LOHENGRIN,” “THE OLD FACTORY,”
&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

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RED RYVINGTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE BELLS.

A SUMMER morning in the valley of the Upper Rhone.

A wayfarer in orthodox pedestrian costume—knickerbockers, Norfolk jacket, helmet-shaped hat, and mountain boots—is walking leisurely down the Furca Road. In one hand he carries a stout alpenstock, strong enough to sustain a man's weight over a crevasse; from his belt is suspended a geological hammer. A strap slung across his right shoulder holds a light waterproof coat; a second, slung across the other shoulder, supports a light hand-bag.

Other incumbrances the traveller has none. He has discovered that Switzerland possesses the cheapest and best organised parcel post in Europe. Before setting out on a journey he puts a postage stamp on his baggage and consigns it to the nearest post office, addressed to his next destination, where he never fails to find it on his arrival thither.

Our wayfarer is young; he does not look more than five or six and twenty, and his countenance, equally with his dress, attest his English nationality. The bronze tint of it, and the peeled appearance of his cheeks, show that he has lately spent much time in the open air, and probably made more than one excursion among the glaciers of the high Alps. As touching stature he is rather under than over middle height, wide-shouldered and deep-chested; and the breadth of his hand, as it grasps his alpenstock, shows that it has been accustomed to wield heavier tools than painter's brush or writer's pen. His face is oval and perhaps too long to suit a fastidious taste, albeit the defect is rendered less apparent by a long tawny beard, which, moreover, so completely covers

his mouth and chin that it is difficult to determine whether these important features denote firmness of character or weakness of purpose. To complete our description, it remains only to add that the traveller has a broad, intelligent forehead, a somewhat large, though straight, nose, well-marked eyebrows, and large, deep blue eyes—the whites of them remarkably clear and bright—a sign of health and high spirits often observable in persons of temperate habits who have passed some time in the open air at great altitudes.

From time to time the pedestrian stops in his walk to break a geological specimen from an erratic block, to gather from the wayside an alpine flower, or to gaze on the prospect around him; as well he may, for the scene is one of stupendous grandeur. He is between two mountains, the Galenstock and the Grimsel. Behind him rises the great mass of the cloud-pinnacled Furca. Peaks still loftier—the alps of the Valais and the Oberland, the Shreckhorn, the Finsteraarhorn, and the Mischabel—crowned with their eternal diadems of snow, are in view. The road he is traversing, cut in the flank of the

Galenstock, skirts the great Rhone glacier, which gleams in the unclouded sunshine like a frozen Niagara, as if some mighty cascade, leaping down the gorge, had been stopped in full career and turned into ice by the stroke of an enchanter's wand.

As the traveller advances, the character of the scenery changes. Hardly a sign of vegetation is visible. He is enclosed between great ramparts of rock. The ground is strewn with huge blocks of weird shape, like the ruins of a shattered planet, while great ribs of granite, which might be the bones of a buried world, thrust themselves from the ground. A tremendous rift intersects the valley, down which the new-born Rhone, as if mad with joy at being released from its icy prison, forces its way; but so deep is the abyss that in the upper air the wild uproar of its foam-churned waters sounds like the murmur of a summer stream.

The road is a marvel, winding now between frowning crags, now, where the valley widens out, through green meadows, brilliant with cowslips, primroses, and the blue gentian—skirting ever and anon the gloomy gorge through which

rushes the turbid torrent, swollen by the melting of alpine snows. Seen from afar, the road is

‘Like a silver zone,
Flung about carelessly, it shines afar,
Catching the eye in many a broken link,
In many a turn and traverse as it glides ;
And oft above and oft below appears,
Seen o’er the wall by one who journeys up
As though it were another, through the wild,
Leading along, he knows not whence or whither.
Yet through its fairy course, go where it will,
The torrent stops it not, the rugged rock
Opens and lets it in, and on it runs,
Winning its easy way from clime to clime,
Through glens locked up before.’

In plain prose, the Furca road, like other alpine roads, is a zig-zag, and however picturesque zig-zags of this sort, when seen from a distance, may be, they are terribly round about ; and pedestrians who want to save their legs, and dislike heat and dust, do not disdain to take short cuts through the woods or meadows that border the way, varied by an occasional scramble over a promontory of rock. This expedient Randle Ryvington often adopted, all the more willingly as the trees with their heavy foliage offered an agreeable shade, and the foot-

paths were free from the dust that rendered the high road well nigh unbearable. After making one of these short cuts, whereby he saved several miles of road walking, he threw himself down on a mossy bank at the foot of a tall pine-tree, near which flowed a tiny stream of crystal water. Then, drawing from his pocket a case of sandwiches, he proceeded to eat with good appetite, as indeed he might,—for it was well nigh noon, and he had been afoot since early morning,—washing down his repast with an occasional draught from the rill. He next lit a pipe, and, after solacing himself with a smoke, lay down at full length, his head pillowed on a piece of velvety turf, and looked up at the patches of blue sky that showed through the verdant fretwork of the tree tops. The attitude, the hour, the place seemed favourable to meditation, and Randle set himself to meditate accordingly; but the circumstances were still more favourable for repose, and after several vain efforts to collect his ideas, and resume the thread of thought which he had begun with his pipe, he fell into a deep sleep, well earned by the fatigues of the day.

He had slept, he knew not how long, when he awoke with a start and the sound of bells in his ears, his first thought being that he was in his own bed at home, and that the Whitebrook factories were ringing in the hands to their work. A single glance at the blue sky overhead showed him his mistake, and the continued tinkling of bells and the crackings of whips in the distance roused him to full consciousness. Rising to his feet, and looking upward through the trees, he perceived that his 'knocker-up' was one of those huge vehicles known in German Switzerland as a post wagon, and in the Swiss Romande as a diligence—a sort of Noah's ark on wheels, carrying a ton of luggage and a score of passengers, and strong enough and heavy enough to have outlasted the life of an antediluvian patriarch. The ponderous concern was dragged by six horses, three abreast, to each of whose collars were attached two or three bells, the ringing of which had wakened Randle from his sleep.

The diligence, driven at a tremendous speed in a cloud of dust, descended the hill. After waiting until the dust had somewhat subsided,

our traveller went down into the road; for the footpath, which for some time had been little more than a faint track, had now ceased altogether, and the hillside was fast becoming too steep and rocky to afford even foothold for goats or vantage ground for fir-trees.

Randle Ryvington resumed his walk, little thinking that the tinkling of those diligence bells, which he could still hear faintly in the distance, marked a turning point in his destiny, or that they had summoned him to save a human life. He was thinking rather of Whitebrook and its factory bells; that his holiday was nearly over; that he must soon make for home, and wondering what news the letters he expected to find at Ouchy would bring him.

He had walked briskly for the greater part of an hour, neither the geological features of the country nor its botanical productions seeming to attract much of his attention, and reached the bottom of a steep incline where the way diverged abruptly to his right, when he heard again the sound of bells, this time behind him. Looking round, he perceived an open travelling carriage descending the incline at a fast trot.

To keep as much out of the dust as possible, Randle drew aside into the angle formed by the turn in the road, and there waited for the vehicle to pass by. The point at which he stood overhung the Rhone, whose white swirling waters, as they dashed themselves against the rocky sides of the gorge, he had only to turn his head to see.

He watched the carriage curiously; for both pace and place were eminently suggestive of the possibility of accident,—what sort of accident Randle shuddered to think. But when he saw that one of the wheels was firmly locked with a shoe and a chain, another held in check by a strong brake, and that, as the carriage neared the bend, the driver pulled his horses into a jog-trot, he felt re-assured.

‘These fellows know their business,’ he muttered; ‘why should I feel concerned? Besides, the penalty of a mistake would be so terrible that they dare not be reckless.’

The carriage, he noticed, contained two ladies and a gentleman, besides a fourth passenger on the box. They also noticed him.

‘That young fellow looks very like an Eng-

lishman,' observed the gentleman, 'pedestrianising, I suppose.'

'I have no doubt he is,' said one of the ladies. 'See how stolidly he stands there, bolt upright, his alpenstock firmly planted and his countenance unmoved.'

'Yes, he looks more like a sentinel on duty than a youth on pleasure bent. But young men now-a-days do take their pleasure sadly—not as they used to do when I was young.'

Meanwhile the object of these remarks was just about to leave his post and continue his walk, when he heard another jingling of bells, and saw, rather to his annoyance, a second carriage coming full trot down the incline; and no sooner had it shot round the corner, and disappeared in a cloud of dust, than a third hove in sight.

Not wanting to be choked, he decided to wait until this, too, had gone by.

He was watching its progress with some impatience, when, as the carriage reached the middle of the brow, he was surprised to perceive that its speed, instead of slackening, suddenly increased. Then he heard a snap; the

horses broke into a canter, which almost instantly became a gallop ; and the driver, after a vain attempt to pull them up, threw down the reins and leaped into the road, leaving his passengers—who, as Randle Ryvington now saw, were two ladies—to their fate. His first impulse was to seize the horses' heads and try to stop them by main force before they reached the precipice ; for turning the corner at the pace they were going was out of the question, even if there had been anyone to guide them. But this expedient was conceived only to be abandoned. To attempt it would be to sacrifice his life to no purpose, for a single glance sufficed to show him that the horses, even with the best will in the world, could not stop. If he tried to withstand them, he must of necessity be thrown down and trampled to death, or hurled over the precipice. As it seemed, nothing short of a miracle could save them and the inmates of the carriage from destruction.

So Randle, despite his burning desire to do something, had to stand helplessly by, and with white face and sternly compressed lips await the issue.

Another minute, and——

The horses are now almost abreast of him ; they are making straight for the abyss. One of the ladies, half rising from her seat, her lips blanched and terror-parted, utters a piercing scream and looks at Randle with appealing eyes.

‘Now or never!’ he says to himself, and as the carriage flashes past he leans forward, seizes the lady in his arms, and, exerting all his strength, lifts her clean over the wheels, and lands her safely beside him.

The next moment the carriage is on the narrow ledge below the road. For a second it seems to dwell there, and then, with a wild cry of fear, the horses with their living freight plunge into the boiling Rhone.

Then Randle Ryvington turned and looked at his companion whom he still held in his arms. She was deadly pale and half fainting, but, as her rescuer thought, very beautiful. Her hat had come off, and her long black hair, loosened by the descent from the carriage, fell over her shoulders like a veil. She seemed young—not more than eighteen, Randle thought, and tall for her age.

He asked her if she felt better, if she was hurt at all. She answered him with a half-dazed, inquiring look, as if she had heard his question without understanding it.

‘Is it a dream or is it real?’ she murmured, pointing to the precipice. ‘Has the carriage gone down there? Where is Miss Joyce?’

‘The carriage has gone down there,’ said Randle, solemnly, ‘and Miss Joyce, if she be the lady who was with you, has gone too. You will never see her alive again.’

‘And I am saved—you have saved me from a terrible death. Oh, sir, I know not who you are, but I owe you my life.’

‘You owe it, not to me, but to God. I was called to save you. If it had not been for the ringing of the bells—— But we are forgetting the driver. See, he is up yonder, writhing in the dust. He did not act a very noble part, it is true, but we must try to help him for all that.’

‘Do you think it was his fault that the horses ran away?’

‘I am not sure that the horses did run away, but in any case he ought not to have left his

post without making more of an effort to stop his horses. I think the shoe must have slipped off the wheel or the chain snapped—perhaps it was never properly secured—and, the man not having his horses well in hand, they were pushed into a gallop. When he left his seat all chance of stopping them was, of course, gone. A little pluck and presence of mind, and all might have been well; but the fellow thought of nothing but saving his own wretched life.’

‘You must not be too severe on him. You know “all that a man hath that will he give for his life.”’

‘And quite right, too—all that he hath. But you see this man risked two lives and lost one that he might keep his own.’

By this time they had reached the spot where the driver lay, apparently unable to rise. Randle submitted him to a rapid examination, and asked him a few questions, in which he was assisted by the young girl, whose knowledge of German was much superior to his own. The man was less hurt than they had expected. The blood on his face came from a

superficial wound on the head, which was easily staunched by a pocket handkerchief. His other injuries consisted of a few contusions and a severely sprained ankle. Randle, after giving him a drink from his pocket-flask, helped him to the roadside and made him as comfortable as was possible in the circumstances. His account of the accident was that the horses, startled by the snapping of the chain, and feeling the carriage almost on their haunches, rushed madly down the hill. When he found it impossible to stop them he jumped into the road. He did not appear conscious of having in any way failed in his duty, and Randle could not command enough German to tell him what he thought of his conduct. He did not object to be left. A vehicle of some sort was sure to pass before long, he said, that would give him a lift as far as Viesch.

CHAPTER II.

TALK BY THE WAY.

THE next question with Randle was what to do with the fair girl whom he had rescued, and who was evidently so overcome with agitation and distress as to be in no condition to judge for herself. He could not ask her what she proposed to do, so he inquired what he could do for her, and whither she would like to go. If she would remain there, he said, with the post-boy he would hurry on to the nearest village and fetch a carriage, so that she might continue her journey.

‘Oh, no,’ she replied, ‘I would not like to remain here. If you will let me’ (timidly) ‘I would rather walk on with you. When the others find that our carriage does not come they will wait and we can overtake them.’

‘The others? You belong to the party in the two carriages that have just passed, then?’

‘Yes, my father and mother and the courier are in the first, my sisters and the maids in the second. We are on our way from Chur to Zermatt. Miss Joyce—the lady—the lady who was with me, was our governess. She has been with us ever since I was a little girl. She was so good and kind, and we all loved her—oh! we loved her.’

Here the poor girl’s lip quivered and a sob choked her utterance.

‘Are you quite sure, sir,’ she exclaimed, when she was again able to speak, ‘I mean, do you think she is surely killed—that there is no possibility she may have escaped?’

‘I fear, none. No creature could fall down that precipice and live. It is a sheer descent of nearly a thousand feet. But before we go I will look; though the gorge hereabouts is so deep, and the river so rough, that I do not expect to see any trace either of the carriage or the horses.’

As Randle spoke he let himself down from

the road to the narrow ledge bordering the precipice five or six feet below, and, lying full length on the ground, gazed long and intently down the face of the rock and into the seething water. Then he rose and rejoined his companion, who had been anxiously watching him.

‘I can see nothing whatever of the carriage and horses,’ he said, ‘but on a piece of jutting rock, out of which grows a bush, about a hundred yards down, I thought I saw the fluttering of a robe. It may be part of the poor lady’s dress, or even her body.’

‘Alive?’

Randle shook his head.

‘The concussion alone, the slightest touch against the side of the gorge, after so tremendous a fall, would be enough to cause instant death, even if the flight through the air had not caused it already. But it would be well for somebody to go down and see. And if it is the poor lady’s body it must be brought up and receive Christian burial. And now, if you feel sufficiently recovered, we had perhaps better go on. The other carriages will be a long way ahead of us by this time.’

The young lady, who, as Randle perceived, could not trust herself to speak, bowed, in token of acquiescence, and they set out on their walk. He began by adapting his pace to hers, but he soon found that she was almost as good a pedestrian as himself; and having the advantage of falling ground they made rapid progress, doing four miles in little more than an hour.

‘Oh, how thoughtless and selfish I am,’ exclaimed the girl suddenly, breaking silence for the first time since they had left the scene of the disaster. ‘I hope I am not taking you out of your way. Am I, or were you going in this direction?’

‘Yes; I was on my way to Viesch and Brigue.’

‘I am so glad. It would be really too bad, after all you have done, to make further demands on your kindness. But I should like you to see my father and mother, that they may thank you for having saved their daughter’s life at the peril of your own.’

‘No, no; you mistake; I risked nothing. There is no danger in lifting a young lady from a carriage.’

‘Not when the horses are going full gallop and the carriage is on the edge of a precipice ! It was a feat that required great courage and presence of mind, and you might easily have been crushed under the wheels or thrown into the gorge. Suppose your foot had slipped at the moment you leaned forward to lift me out ! I shall always consider that you saved my life at the risk of your own. You have placed me and my family under an obligation that we can never repay ; and I am sure my father and mother will say the same.’

‘Less than you think for. As I said a little while ago—but you were probably too much agitated to hear me—I was called to save you.’

‘Called to save me ?’ said the girl, wonderingly. ‘How ?’

‘By the ringing of the bells. I was fast asleep up there in the wood, and if it had not been for the ringing of those bells I might have been there yet ; and if the diligence had passed by five minutes sooner or later, I should certainly not have been at the turn of the road when your carriage went into the Rhone——’

‘And I should have gone with it,’ interposed

the young lady, the returning colour again deserting her cheeks.

‘I am afraid so,’ returned Randle, whom the incident seemed to have deeply impressed. ‘But you see it was not to be; it had been ordered otherwise.’

‘Poor Miss Joyce!’

‘Yes, one is taken and another left. Life is full of mysteries. It is only a question of a few years with the youngest and the strongest of us. There is an appointed time for all men, and when our time comes we must shuffle off this mortal coil as those have done who have gone before us.’

‘Do you belong to our church?’ said the other, somewhat timidly, for she had not been used to this sort of talk, and scarcely knew what to say.

‘I think so. At least, if you mean the Church of England, I do—in a fashion.’

‘Are you High or Low?’

‘That is a difficult question to answer. If I wanted to be very precise I should say a little of both and not very much of either,’ said Randle, inwardly amused at the turn the conversation was taking.

‘Perhaps you are Broad?’

‘In some things I am—very. In others people say I am very narrow. But is not that a carriage crawling up the next zig-zag? It seems empty, too.’

‘Yes; I do not see anybody but the driver.’

‘If it is empty, do you not think it would be well to get the driver to turn round and take you to Viesch? Your parents will be there by this time, and may be anxious about you.’

‘You will go with me?’

‘Certainly, if you wish it.’

‘Oh yes, I do wish it. Papa and mamma would be very sorry if they were not to see you and thank you.’

‘I shall be very glad to make their acquaintance, I am sure; but if it were possible I should be glad to be spared the thanks.’

‘I mean,’ added Randle, fearing that the remark might appear somewhat rude, whereas, in fact, it was attributable in about equal measure to bashfulness and modesty—‘I mean that you have already thanked me quite as much as I deserve, and you know in what a

strange manner I happened to be near when the accident befell.'

'Yes, I know. It was God's doing, and it is our duty to thank Him. But it was your doing also, and we should fail in our duty if we were not to thank you, and I am sure my father and mother will say the same. I shall never forget it as long as I live—never.'

'Here comes the carriage,' said Randle, glad of an opportunity to turn the conversation. 'The man seems to have no passengers. I do not suppose he is likely to make any difficulty about taking us to Viesch.'

Nor did he—at least none that did not yield to an offer of full fare and double *Trinkgeld*—and in half an hour they were at Viesch.

As the carriage drove up to the hall door, a stout, middle-aged gentleman, of commonplace though pleasant countenance, destitute of beard or whisker, came forward, looking very much surprised.

'How is this, Muriel? What have you been doing so long? Where is Miss Joyce? And—and—who is this gentleman?'

‘I do not know who he is, papa, but he has saved my life, and Miss Joyce is—is——’

And here Muriel burst into tears.

‘What has happened? Has there been an accident? Why, this is not the same carriage. There has been an accident.’

‘There has, indeed. The driver lost command of his horses, and the poor lady who was with your daughter was carried down into the Rhone.’

‘And Muriel?’

‘This gentleman saved me, papa—dragged me out of the carriage only one second before the horses rushed over the precipice, at the peril of his life.’

‘Thank God, thank God, and’ (turning to Randle) ‘may God bless you, sir, for your courage and devotion. You have made us your debtors for life. Might I ask to whom we are beholden for this great service?’

‘My name is Randle Ryvington. But you make too much of what I did, sir; you do, indeed; and when you know all the circumstances——’

‘It is sufficient for me to know that by an

act of courage and devotion you saved my child from a frightful danger. No explanation can minimise it, my dear sir, or lessen the obligation under which you have placed me and my family. But it is time, I think, that you knew something more of us. I am Lord Lindisfarne; the young lady whose life you have saved is Lady Muriel Avalon; and if you will kindly accompany me into the hotel I will introduce you to the countess and my other daughters, who will, I am sure, add their thanks to mine.'

So Randle, not being able to resist a request so kindly put, followed his new acquaintance, and had the honour of being introduced to Lady Lindisfarne and her eldest and younger daughters, the Ladies Maude and Mary, one of whom was a few years the senior, the other a few years the junior, of Lady Muriel, and, notwithstanding the young man's shyness—of which, however, there was little outward manifestation—he did not find their gratitude embarrassing. For though the expression of it was warm and, to all appearance, sincere, not a word was said which gave him any sense of discomfort or of

being overpraised. They all seemed much shocked and distressed at the terrible death of Miss Joyce, yet it seemed to Randle that their grief was less acute than Muriel's had been.

CHAPTER III.

RAISING THE DEAD.

‘DO you think, Mr. Ryvington,’ said Lord Lindisfarne, after the story of the accident had been told and retold, and its causes and consequences curiously discussed, ‘that poor Miss Joyce’s body was caught on that bush and still remains there?’

‘I think it is very likely—so likely that it would be well to place the matter beyond doubt by sending somebody down to see.’

‘If it be there we must, of course, have it brought up and buried. But will not that be very difficult? How far down did you say it was?’

‘Three or four hundred feet, I should think. I do not think there will be any great difficulty either in ascertaining if the body be there or of

bringing it up if it is—with proper appliances, of course. I have given my mind to a little practical engineering occasionally, and if I can be of any use I am sure I shall be very glad.’

‘Thank you very much, your help will be most welcome,’ said Lord Lindisfarne. ‘You are really too kind: not content with conferring upon us one inestimable obligation, you seek to confer upon us another. But can you remain here all night without inconvenience to yourself?’

‘Certainly. In no case should I have gone farther than Brigue, and I am not sure that I should not have stayed here.’

‘It was our intention to go on to Brigue this afternoon; but we cannot, of course, continue our journey without making an attempt to recover poor Miss Joyce’s body, and give it decent burial. You spoke of appliances just now. We shall want a long rope, I suppose, and some sort of hoisting tackle?’

‘If any is to be had here, which, from the look of the place, I greatly doubt. But I will just look round the village and see what they have got. There is sure to be a forge, and

somebody who can do a bit of iron and wood work ; and if there is not I daresay I can contrive what is necessary myself.'

'If you will permit me I will go with you. I can perhaps be of some use, for I was once a sailor.'

'A sailor, Lord Lindisfarne?'

'Yes, I was a few years in the navy in my young days ; but it is so long ago that I am afraid I have lost all my cunning in the matter of ropes, though I think if I tried I could still reef a topsail and tie a bowline knot.'

'By all means come. Your advice and help will be most useful, and my knowledge of German is so very limited that I fear that alone I should not be able to make these fellows understand what I want.'

'In that case I am probably worse equipped than yourself, for I hardly know German at all. But that is easily arranged ; we must have the courier with us ; he will interpret for you.'

After taking counsel with the innkeeper they visited the blacksmith and the joiner, the latter of whom also acted as master-builder ; but, as Randle expected, the best hoisting machinery

available was of the most primitive description, and not at all suited for the purpose required. He was obliged, therefore, to make shift with such rough tackle as he could devise, and the village workmen put together on the spur of the moment. A cat-head was contrived by fixing a strong though extremely clumsy block to the end of a stout post, which Randle proposed to make fast at the edge of the precipice with iron clamps, forged after his instructions by the blacksmith. Ropes there were and to spare, but a good deal of splicing had to be done before the length Randle deemed necessary was prepared. To the end of it was attached a wooden seat like that of a swing, and a short rope with hook and eye to loop round the body, if it should be found.

When all was ready an expedition consisting of three vehicles and seven or eight men, besides Lord Lindisfarne, Randle Ryvington, the courier, and a young Englishman of the name of Voules, who volunteered to accompany them and lend a hand, set out for the scene of the accident. The days were fortunately then at their longest, and, though the hour was some-

what late, nobody doubted that the object they had in view could easily be accomplished before nightfall. And so, if all had gone well, it might have been. They only forgot, as people generally do, to allow for the unforeseen.

‘Which of these fellows do you propose to lower into the gulf?’ asked Lord Lindisfarne of Randle, as their carriage toiled slowly up the steep ascent near—

‘Where the swift Rhone cleaves his way between
Heights which appear as lovers who have parted
In haste, whose mining depths so intervene,
That they can meet no more, though broken-hearted.’

‘To swing down there at the end of a rope five hundred feet long were a fitting feat for a maintopman.’

‘Or a North Country steeple-Jack,’ said Randle, with a smile. ‘I do not propose to ask any of them to go down; I mean to undertake that job myself.’

‘You, Mr. Ryvington! Oh, no, that would be too bad. You have done enough for us already, my dear sir; more than we can ever repay. Let one of those men go down. I have no doubt they will be quite willing enough

for a sufficient consideration. For a couple of napoleons I daresay everyone of them would volunteer.'

'I should think that is very likely. At the same time you must remember that we do not know these men, nor what they can do, nor what sort of nerves they possess. They probably do not know themselves. Now it would be a very sad thing if one of them—perhaps a man with a family—when he had been lowered away and beyond the reach of help, should grow faint or giddy, lose his hold, and fall into the river. If one has nerve the thing is easy enough, hardly more dangerous than sitting in an arm-chair at home. I have no doubt about my nerves. I have proved them lately in several alpine excursions, much more perilous than being swung over the Rhone at the end of a long rope, and quite as trying to the nerves. I think you had better let me have my way, Lord Lindisfarne.'

'I cannot deny that there is much force in what you say, and I should certainly be very sorry for one of these men to make the attempt and come to grief for want of nerve.

Yet I am very reluctant to tax your kindness still further. Is there no other way?’

‘Of getting up the body, you mean; for I am almost sure it is there?’

‘Yes.’

‘I do not think there is; and you would not like to leave it where it is.’

‘Certainly not. It is only a sentiment, perhaps, but it would seem the height of unkindness not to put the poor creature decently under the ground after all the years she has been with us; and the very suggestion of such a thing would be intolerable both to Lady Lindisfarne and my daughters, especially to Muriel, who was really warmly attached to Miss Joyce.’

‘It shall be done, Lord Lindisfarne, and do not think that you are overtaxing my kindness as you put it; for I like to do things, and this, after all, is so small a thing to do.’

‘Be it so then, Mr. Ryvington. But whatever you may say I do not consider it a small thing to do; and you are placing us under obligations which we shall never be able to repay. But you will know how to take the

will for the deed, and if ever the opportunity offers there shall be no lack of deed. Of that you may be assured.'

Randle bowed. He could not think just then of any suitable answer, and was glad to be able to divert the conversation by pointing out to his companion the scene of the accident, whither they had now almost arrived, and explaining his plan of campaign.

The first thing to be done was the fixing of the cathead as nearly as possible in a direct line with the bush whereon the drapery, supposed to be that of Miss Joyce, could still be seen fluttering in the breeze, a work which Randle's forethought in providing the clamps rendered easy of accomplishment. For greater security the concern was further stayed with ropes, which were fastened to two stout fir-trees hard by. The long rope was then run through the block, and Randle seated himself in his chair, which, by means of a strap passing round his body and the rope, was so arranged that he had the free use of his hands. He carried with him a revolver and a supply of cartridges for signalling purposes. One shot

meant stop ; two, go on lowering ; three, hoist up. As there was no winding tackle the rope would, of course, have to be paid out by hand. To Mr. Voules was assigned the duty of watching the cat-head, and seeing that the men lowered steadily, and not too fast ; while Lord Lindisfarne undertook to stand by the coil of rope and keep it from fouling, a duty for which his experience as a sailor well fitted him.

When these arrangements were completed the word was given to lower away, and Randle found himself swinging in face of a huge wall of rock of forbidding appearance, with the purple sky above and the raging Rhone beneath him. The oscillation was his greatest difficulty, and the more the rope was paid out the worse it became. It was all he could do to keep himself from being dashed against the side and seriously hurt, for the rock was far from being as smooth as it appeared from above. It was seamed with age and the action of the weather, and abounded in sharp angles, hollows, and elevations, which rendered Randle's task much more onerous, and, as he confessed to himself, more dangerous than he had looked

for. But he had little leisure for reflection—all his wits, as well as all his limbs, were in constant requisition. Nor was he the man to withdraw from any work to which he had once put his hand. The very strangeness of the position, moreover, had a charm for him—dangling between two mighty crags, in presence of the immensity of Nature, as much cut off from the world as if he had been in the bowels of the earth. The consciousness that his life hung on a frail rope that might at any moment be severed by a sharp corner of rock tended rather to give zest to his excitement than to damp his spirits. Men of adventurous temperament, high courage, and youthful energy find a pleasure in dangers which they can combat, and delight in perils that call forth their supremest capacities of action and endurance.

At length Randle, unhurt but breathless, found himself immediately above the place, where, as he could see, lay the body of the unfortunate Miss Joyce. He calculated the distance to a nicety, and a minute before he came level with the spot, fired the shot which was to give the signal of stoppage.

CHAPTER IV.

A DROP TOO MUCH.

VOULES, who was on the lookout, saw the flash before he heard the report.

‘Stop!’ he sang out.

‘Höret auf!’ shouted the courier.

The sound of the shot, faintly heard, was followed by a series of echoes, as if Randle were engaged in a combat with unseen foes.

‘Has he found anything. Can you see what he is doing?’ asked Lord Lindisfarne.

‘I think he has found something; but what he is doing I cannot make out. It is growing dark down there, and objects are very indistinct.’

‘I daresay; the sun is getting low, and even at full noon there cannot be much light in that gorge.’

A few minutes passed in complete silence, all listening intently, while Voules, with one hand on the cat-head, looked down the precipice.

‘One,’ said Voules, as a sharp flash of light shot upward in the deepening gloom, ‘two—three; hoist slowly.’

‘Hebt langsam auf,’ shouted the courier, and amid a volley of smothered echoes, the men began to pull the rope home, keeping in mind the caution to heave slowly, and a second exhortation, given by Lord Lindisfarne, to heave steadily.

‘Pity we have not some sort of capstan,’ said the peer, after the pulling had been going on four or five minutes. ‘I don’t much like this hand work. The men must jerk more or less, do as they will. Do they find it a heavy pull, courier?’

‘Not as heavy as they expected, my lord. They are rather surprised at its lightness; for Mr. Ryvington is sure to be bringing the body up with him, I suppose?’

‘No doubt, if he has found it; and Mr. Voules seems to be sure that he has. We shall soon know——

‘My God! what has happened?’ exclaimed his lordship, as Voules uttered a cry of dismay, and the hoisters fell in a confused heap on the ground.

‘The rope has parted,’ said Voules, hoarsely, in his agitation hardly able to speak, ‘and—and——’

‘You surely don’t mean that Ryvington has gone to the bottom—that he is killed?’

‘I am afraid it is so, my lord,’ put in the courier. ‘See, the rope is quite slack; there is evidently no weight at the other end.’

‘And I saw it break,’ said Voules; ‘at least I saw the one end fly up and the other go down.’

‘Poor fellow! poor fellow!’ muttered Lord Lindisfarne, ‘and he was so confident about there being no danger. I shall never forgive myself for allowing him to go down. I wonder who his friends are? Can we do nothing—is there no possibility of his being alive? Ask those men, courier; they know the place and the river. Ask them if there is no chance of saving him. He might swim, you know.’

The courier shook his head.

‘They say, my lord, that the gentleman could not possibly reach the water without striking against the side; that if he did, he could hardly miss striking against one of the huge boulders which lie in thousands in the bed of the river. And even supposing that, by a miracle, he has escaped these two dangers, the Rhone is so full of whirlpools, and it is so far to any place where he could land, that swimming would be quite out of the question. They think, my lord, that there is not the least hope.’

‘Poor fellow! and, beyond his name, we know nothing of him. We shall have a sorrowful tale to tell when we get back to Viesch. It is very, very distressing.’

‘He was a brave fellow,’ said Voules, as a tear rolled down his cheek; ‘a fine fellow.’

‘A noble fellow; a young man of rare courage and presence of mind. He saved my daughter’s life this morning, and now, in trying to do me a service, he has lost his own. What made the rope break, do you think? It seemed strong enough to carry three or four people.’

‘Cut by chafing against a sharp point of rock,’

said Voules, who by this time had got the remnant of rope hauled in. 'See here.'

'Yes, cut as if with a knife. What shall we do? How communicate with his friends? Poor young gentleman! What a death!'

And Lord Lindisfarne, who appeared deeply affected by Randle's tragic end, peered, shuddering, into the gulf; but so deep was the gloom that hardly anything could be seen, and, beyond the beating of the wild waters of the river on the rocks beneath, nothing heard.

'The men are right, Mr. Voules, I fear,' he remarked to the young Englishman, who was standing near him. 'He is dead beyond a doubt, and I do not suppose we shall be able even to recover his body. Ah! what is that?'

A tongue of flame flashed for a moment in the darkness, followed at an interval of two or three seconds by a faint yet distinct crack, which startled all the echoes of the gorge, and they answered back as with muffled breath.

'It is he! He is not dead, then!' exclaimed the peer; 'but where can he be? How has he escaped?'

By this time the courier and all the helpers

were lying full length on the ground and craning over the brink of the precipice.

Then came another shot, followed by another round of echoes.

‘The men think, my lord,’ said the courier, ‘that the gentleman was not on the rope when it broke, that he sent up the body of the lady first, thinking to follow himself afterwards, and that he is still on the ledge of rock where he found the body. That is the reason it was so much easier to haul up than the men expected. The pistol shot is to tell us that the gentleman is alive, and to ask for help.’

‘You think he is down there, clinging to a ledge of rock? Good heaven, what a position, and we here doing nothing! Lower the rope; tell the men to lower the rope at once, courier.’

‘It is a great deal too short, my lord; the greater part of it is broken off and fallen into the river.’

‘True, true; I had forgotten that. What shall we do, then? Look here, Mr. Voules. Will you kindly remain here with two or three of the men—you can send one of them to the nearest inn for some refreshment—and I will go

with the courier and the others to Viesch for more rope? We shall use all possible speed, and be back, I hope, in two or three hours.'

'Certainly, Lord Lindisfarne. I will remain with pleasure. But should we not do something to let Mr. Ryvington know that we have heard the shots, and that help is coming.'

'You are quite right. What shall we do? Shout?'

'I do not think he could hear a shout; the rush of the river would drown our voices, even if we were to shout our loudest and all together. We must answer his light with another light. I will see if I cannot manufacture a torch out of paper and some of these rotten fir branches that are lying about, and then we will make a bonfire, the glare of which he is sure to see.'

'Very well; I will leave all that to you. The sooner we get away the sooner shall we be able to deliver Mr. Ryvington from his purgatory in that terrible gorge.'

CHAPTER V.

LEFT SITTING.

THE thing Randle had taken for a bush proved to be a stunted fir-tree. It grew on a narrow ledge of rock—too narrow to give a man foothold, yet wide enough to hold a bit of soil wafted thither by the wind. Here the tree had taken root, and solidly anchored itself by shooting its tough tentacles into the interstices of the cliff. On this shrub—for it was little more—Miss Joyce had fallen, and, as Randle at once saw, life was utterly extinct. Her poor body was fearfully mangled. He shuddered as he looked at it, and almost regretted that he had not yielded to Lord Lindisfarne's advice, and let some other person undertake the job. But the hesitation was only momentary, and after a few minutes' thought he addressed himself to

his task. His original idea had been to fasten the body under his seat with the loop he had caused to be made for the purpose, and carry it up with him. But when he recalled the difficulties of the descent, and thought of the increased stress on the rope the ghastly burden would entail—for Miss Joyce was a much bigger woman than he had expected—he altered his plan. He resolved to send the body up first, and wait where he was until the arm-chair, as he had jokingly called it to Lord Lindisfarne, could be lowered a second time.

It was a choice of evils, and, like a wise man, he chose the one that seemed to him the least. The body going up alone would doubtless get a good deal knocked against the rocks, but that was decidedly a smaller evil than getting knocked about himself, and, perhaps, badly hurt, to say nothing of the greater strain on the rope and the risk of its breaking, while the poor governess would be none the worse for a few additional bruises.

Having arrived at this resolution, Randle hooked the body to the rope, placed himself on the stunted fir-tree, and gave the preconcerted

signal to hoist, by discharging two barrels of his revolver.

He found the shrub decidedly less comfortable than the seat he had just quitted. That at least was a seat; this was literally a perch, and about as unpleasant a perch as could well be. In the first place, it was exceedingly rough and covered with little branches, which made a very bad substitute for cushions. In the next place, he could not sit sideways for fear of losing his balance and falling headforemost into the Rhone, which, as he reckoned, was a good hundred yards below him. So he was obliged to straddle.

Now, sitting astride of a horse, or a tree trunk of respectable dimensions, is one thing; straddling across a stunted fir-tree, half way down a precipice a thousand feet deep, with nothing save space between yourself and a raging flood, is quite another thing. It is not easy to get a good grip of a thing not more than three or four inches in diameter, and Randle's perch was so painfully narrow that, in order to preserve his balance, he was constrained to lean forward and grasp the tree firmly with his hands. It

was 'sitting on a rail' with a vengeance, Randle said to himself, and he did not care how soon the penance was at an end. He might have to endure it some twenty minutes, he thought, that being about the time it would take to hoist up the body and let down the 'arm-chair.'

As he arrived at this conclusion he heard a noise overhead; but, before he could raise his head to look, something whizzed closely past him—so closely that, in the involuntary movement he made to avoid it, he almost lost his equilibrium. Following the object with his eyes, which had now become accustomed to the obscurity, he saw the fated body of poor Miss Joyce, after bounding from point to point of the rocky wall, plunge into the milk-white water of the Rhone. Then he looked upward and saw the broken end of the rope dangling in mid air.

'What an escape!' he murmured, breathing at the same time a prayer of thankfulness to the Divine Being, to whose interposition he ascribed his escape.

It was only by degrees, as his preoccupation subsided, that he realised the full peril of his position; but as he looked down through the gloom

towards the cruel foam of the surging flood, and upward to the unreachable brink of the precipice, his heart for a moment failed him, and he doubted if he should ever again put his foot on solid earth. But he quickly shook off his despondency. 'If my hour had come,' he thought, 'I should not be here now; I should have gone up with the body—and down with it. It will be time to despair when I can do nothing else. I can hold on an hour yet. But I must let them know up there that I am still alive, and in need of help.' And with that he drew his pistol and fired the two last shots it contained. But he had still a few cartridges left.

Then he began to consider his position with a view to making it safer and more endurable, for, roused by his danger to greater sharpness of observation, he perceived that the impact of Miss Joyce's body had greatly impaired the integrity of the tree. Some of its roots had been torn from their fastenings, and, when he moved, it yielded to his weight in a way that was anything but re-assuring. He thought too—albeit this apprehension may have rendered him fanciful—that the tree was sinking

very slightly perhaps, yet still perceptibly, giving way under his weight. Whether ill or well founded, the idea was not a pleasant one, and he resolved to lessen the pressure, and get some support for his back, by turning round and creeping nearer the rock. The operation was a sufficiently ticklish one, for even when sitting still he had a difficulty in keeping his balance; and if his surmise as to the condition of the tree were correct every movement would tend to make it still more precarious. When he swung his leg round, the branch bent and creaked in a way that would have made a more nervous man give pause; but Randle went on, and when he reached the rock, and leaned against the ledge and the roots, he was pleased to see that the shrub, relieved from a portion of his weight, raised its drooping head by several inches.

Though the change rendered Randle's position more tolerable and much safer than it had previously been, it was still one of extreme discomfort. His legs, arms, and back ached to a degree that nobody who has not undergone the experience of sitting astride the slender branch

of a tree for a considerable time can have any idea of. He could not lean against the rock for long together, as not only were its angles and projections painfully sharp, but water trickled down it, and he was soon wet to the skin. Then it grew bitterly cold; for although the day had been warm the sun's rays reached the depths of the ravine during only a few hours of the twenty-four; and the river brought with it a wind keen enough, as Randle thought, to have been iced by the glaciers in which the Rhone had its birth. But few predicaments are so bad that they might not be worse; and, rightly regarded, there are no evils without their consolations. As luck would have it, Randle had his pipe with him, tobacco, and matches; and after several vain essays he succeeded in striking a light and treating himself to a smoke. The moment this match went out—and as it might seem in answer thereto—there came a red glare overhead, brightly reflected in the opposite side of the abyss, in which he rightly read a response to his signal and an intimation that help was not far off.

Then he thought of the varied incidents of

the day, of the strange contrast they offered to the somewhat monotonous routine of his life at home, and how seemingly trivial incidents lead sometimes to momentous results. Who could have supposed that his sleep in the wood, and the tinkling of the diligence bells, would be the means of saving the life of an earl's daughter and bringing his own into deadly peril—for what purpose time alone could tell. For Randle Ryvington firmly believed in a divine influencing of human affairs, and his early training had given his character somewhat of a bent towards fatalism, which subsequent circumstances had tended rather to confirm than relax.

Then he thought of his past life, of the incidents of his Swiss tour, of Whitebrook, of business, of a hundred things besides—until little by little a feeling of intense drowsiness overcame him, his ideas grew faint and confused, his head drooped, and he fell into a dose from which he awoke with a start so violent that he almost lost his hold of the tree and fell down the precipice. But the heaviness—in which he recognised an effect of the bitter cold

—still clung to him, and so great was his inclination to sleep that even the consciousness that to indulge in it would be death hardly sufficed to keep him awake. He shook himself, he let the water from the rock trickle down his back, he tried to count and identify the stars in the narrow strip of purple sky that vaulted the gulf; he reckoned over and over again how soon he might be released from his strange prison; he struck match after match to see how sped the time; he smoked all the tobacco in his pouch.

At length, when he had exhausted all these and sundry other devices, and had begun to feel that, die or not, he must sleep, he heard what seemed to his fevered mind like voices from the stars, and, looking upwards, he saw lights in violent agitation.

The sight gave him new courage; his sleepiness vanished like a dream; he knew that relief was at hand.

A few minutes later the lights began to descend.

Randle loaded his pistol so that he might give the signals.

As the lights drew nearer he perceived that they came from two torches fastened to the cradle, or seat, in which he was to be carried to *terra firma*. In his excitement he stood up, and placed one foot on the shrub, the other on the ledge of rock, a feat that in cool blood, and by daylight, he had hardly dared to attempt.

The moment was an anxious one, for the rope carrying little weight it oscillated considerably, and the cradle might easily pass so wide of the fir-tree as to be beyond his grasp. When it reached the level of his shoulder he gave the signal, and a few seconds thereafter it stopped.

What he feared had come to pass. The cradle, swaying to the right, was prevented by a roughness of the rock, or some other obstruction from returning to where Randle stood. Reaching it was out of the question. It was two yards off, at least.

There was only one way, as he thought, of meeting the emergency. He gave the signal to pay out more rope, and returning the revolver to his pocket, braced himself for the desperate effort he had resolved to make.

When the cradle reached the level of the tree it came a little nearer, and Randle, after measuring the distance with his eye, leaped boldly towards it, and succeeded in grasping the woodwork with both hands. As one of the torches, dislodged by the shock, fell through the darkness, leaving behind it a scattering route of sparks, Randle found himself dangling in mid-air, while the cradle, still descending, swayed violently to and fro. But he retained his presence of mind and kept his hold; and after steadying the rope by planting his legs against the rock, he succeeded, without much difficulty, in mounting to his seat, when he lost no time in firing the signal to hoist. The next moment he was moving in the opposite direction, and although in constant apprehension of the rope again parting, he reached the goal without further mishap, save a slight bruising of his hands and face against the rock.

CHAPTER VI.

WORDS OF GRATITUDE.

AS Randle stepped from his cradle into the full light of a blazing fire, he was greeted with loud cheers. The news that an Englishman was holding on to a fir-tree half way down the bed of the Rhone had spread far and wide, and the road was crowded with people from Viesch and Munster, who had come to witness his deliverance or shudder over his fate. Among them were several carriages, in one of which were seated Lady Lindisfarne and her two elder daughters.

This was more than Randle had bargained for, and he felt somewhat embarrassed at being under the necessity, in his present not very presentable condition, of appearing before so distinguished a company. And he looked

worse than he knew. His hat was gone, his hair dishevelled, his face blackened with smoke and streaked with blood, and his clothes were wet, dirty, and torn.

But if he had been a prince returning from a successful war he could hardly have received a warmer welcome. Voules was the first to greet him. Then the rough-handed, hearty fellows who had been pulling the rope insisted on shaking his hand and complimenting him on his courage. It was some minutes before Lord Lindisfarne could find an opportunity of offering his congratulations, and leading him to the countess and the ladies Maude and Muriel, to receive their congratulations.

All this embarrassed Randle exceedingly. He would much rather have been allowed to go quietly away, as he said to himself, without fuss. But it was not to be.

‘You are a brave man, Mr. Ryvington,’ said Lady Lindisfarne, after he had assured her, in answer to her inquiries, that he was none the worse, and that the wounds on his face and hands were the merest scratches, and she had expressed her satisfaction at his escape. ‘We

shall never forget how much we owe you—shall we, girls?’

‘Never,’ said Lady Maude, emphatically. ‘We shall never be able to thank Mr. Ryvington enough.’

‘Never,’ murmured Lady Muriel, softly. ‘He saved me from a terrible death, and I shall be grateful to him all my life long.’

‘And he has increased the obligation by risking his life a second time to recover poor Miss Joyce’s body,’ continued the countess. ‘I blame my husband very much for having allowed you to undertake such a dangerous task; but he says you were so determined, and that you both thought there was no risk.’

‘It was quite my own doing, Lady Lindisfarne. Lord Lindisfarne did his best to dissuade me, but I would not let myself be dissuaded. As for the risk, all I can say is that I was very much mistaken. Had I known what I know now, I greatly doubt if I should have made the attempt.’

‘But you did make the attempt, and the danger is too evident to be denied; so evident, indeed, that I shudder to think of it. I am

sure if I had been here I should neither have allowed you nor anyone else to run so frightful a risk.'

'I do not regret having made the attempt, Lady Lindisfarne. I only regret not having succeeded. We have lost poor Miss Joyce's body after all.'

'I know, and am very sorry; but poor Miss Joyce will be none the worse; and as you have saved a life to-day you have good reason for contentment, and we, I am sure, have great cause for thankfulness.'

She accompanied these words with a glance at her daughter, who, while murmuringly echoing her mother's words, bent a look at Randle so eloquent with gratitude that he felt more than rewarded for all the perils he had undergone. He did not say so, however, for just as he was thinking how to put his thoughts into speech Lord Lindisfarne came bustling up.

'Come, come,' exclaimed the peer, whose countenance rather suggested that he had a weakness for good cheer, 'this will not do at all, you know. You are forgetting that Mr. Ryvington has been holding on to that fir

bush four or five hours, that he is sure to be cold, and cannot fail to be hungry. He must have something to eat and drink forthwith. Hallo, courier, bring hither the hamper.'

The hamper was brought accordingly, its contents were unpacked, and Randle, who was quite as hungry as Lord Lindisfarne thought, seating himself, by order of the countess, next to her and opposite to Lady Muriel, made a vigorous attack on a cold fowl, which he washed down with some excellent *vin du pays* mixed with water from a neighbouring well.

Then as a substitute for a hat Lady Muriel with her own hands bound round his head, turban-wise, a soft white shawl, which they all declared became him amazingly.

'May I keep it as a memento of the day?' asked Randle.

'Of course you may,' said the countess, with a keen glance, first at him, then at Muriel; 'but I should like to give you some worthier memento than a shawl.'

'The worth of a memento consists in its associations,' answered Randle, sententiously.

'You are quite right,' observed Lady Maude;

‘and that shawl will serve to remind you that you saved my sister’s life.’

‘I shall not require reminding, Lady Maude. Never, so long as I live, can I forget the events of to-day.’

‘Nor I,’ said Lady Muriel, softly.

‘None of us will ever forget, Mr. Ryvington, the service you have this day rendered us. Gracious heaven! but for you, my child would have been down there in that terrible gorge with poor Miss Joyce! What a fate!’

And, as if the picture her imagination had summoned up was more than she could bear, the countess, with a visible shudder, drew her shawl about her and sank back into her seat.

CHAPTER VII.

FORGET ME NOT.

LORD LINDISFARNE made particular inquiry the next morning as to the likelihood of recovering Miss Joyce's body. Opinions greatly differed. It might be found the very next day ; it might not be found for days and weeks ; and it was far from improbable that it might never be found at all. The river was extremely high, and running with rapid-like swiftness. The body might be carried down without once rising to the surface, and buried under the sand and mud which the Rhone is constantly discharging into the Lake of Geneva.

In these circumstances Lord Lindisfarne did not think it necessary to remain any longer at Viesch. After offering a reward for the finding of the body, which he caused to be exten-

sively advertised, and arranging with the local authorities that, in the event of the body being recovered, it should be decently buried, and himself at once informed of the circumstance, he and his family, accompanied by Randle, went on to Brigue.

Here they had to part, for the Lindisfarnes were bound for Zermatt, and Randle, who telegraphed for his letters to Ouchy, said that he must leave by the first train next morning for Bouveret, on his way to England. He pleaded pressing engagements as a reason for not accepting Lord and Lady Lindisfarne's invitation to spend a few days with them at Zermatt.

‘At any rate, Mr. Ryvington,’ said the earl, as they were about to separate for the night—the early hour at which Randle intended to leave in the morning rendering it improbable that they would meet again before his departure—‘you will favour us with an early visit at Avalon Priory?’

‘Oh, yes, you must come, Mr. Ryvington; we will take no denial. There is no compulsion,

you know—only you must,’ added the countess, with a smile.

Lady Muriel made no remark, but Randle read in her expressive eyes a warmer and more sincere promise of welcome than that which her mother had spoken.

‘You are very kind, Lady Lindisfarne; I am sure I shall be very happy to visit you some time at Avalon Priory,’ answered Randle.

‘Have you Mr. Ryvington’s address, Reginald?’ asked the countess of her husband, that we may write to him when we return home.’

‘Yes, I have his card in my pocket. He gave it me a few minutes ago. We shall probably spend the greater part of the summer in Switzerland, Mr. Ryvington, but immediately we get back to the Priory you shall hear from us. We shall expect a long visit, you know.’

‘I fear I may not be able to spare time for a very long visit, Lord Lindisfarne; I am rather a busy man. But at any rate, whatever may be my engagements, when I hear from you I will come.’

And then they said good night and good-bye.

As Randle stepped out of the Hôtel de la Poste shortly after six the following morning, on his way to the station, he thought he heard a soft voice calling his name. Looking upwards, whence the sound seemed to come, he perceived at a window which opened on a balcony the charming face of Lady Muriel. She held in her hand a bunch of forget-me-nots, and was bidding him a last good-bye and wishing him a pleasant journey.

‘You will be sure to come to Avalon?’ she said, and as she leaned over the balcony one half her bunch of forget-me-nots fluttered to the ground and fell at Randle’s feet.

‘I have promised, Lady Muriel; I am sure to come,’ answered Randle, as he stooped to pick up the forget-me-nots.

Then he stood uncovered for a moment before the balcony and bowed his adieux. When he turned his head for the last time, before losing sight of the hotel, Lady Muriel was still at the window, holding in her hand the remainder of the forget-me-nots.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON LAKE LEMAN.

THE railway from Brigue to Bouveret, although it bears the imposing name of 'Ligne d'Italie,' and, in all probability, is destined sooner or later to make good its designation by linking together Switzerland, France, and Italy, and forming part of a great highway between England and the East, is chiefly remarkable at present for the preternatural slowness of its trains. If the management, as has been suggested, are trying experiments with a view to seeing how slowly trains can be made to go, it must be admitted that they have achieved a great success.

Though the distance Randle had to travel on this sleepy line was not more than eighty or

ninety miles, it was almost noon when he reached his destination—Bouveret, at the head of Lake Lemman—whence he proposed to proceed by water to Nyon, where he had a call to make before continuing his journey homeward.

The day was all that could be desired. The sky was clear and blue, the higher mountains were of a dazzling whiteness, and as the azure wavelets of the lake danced in the sunlight they sparkled like liquid diamonds.

The view from the deck of the steamer was superb, and Randle—who had an inquiring mind—anxious to know the names of some of the peaks around him, put a question, in what he imagined to be the French tongue, to one of the crew.

‘I don’t understand English, monsieur,’ said the fellow, with a deprecatory shake of his head.

Randle bit his lip. Not to be understood is a common experience, but to have your French taken for English is somewhat humiliating; above all, when you have carefully prepared your sentence beforehand and said it over several times in your head before letting it see daylight.

‘These men are really too stupid,’ said a voice near him. ‘That snow-clad mountain before us is the Dent du Midi; the other is the Dent de Morcles. The strangely-shaped one with the two peaks, like two horns, is the Dent d’Oche; and the mountain above Chillon yonder where you see vineyards, meadows, châlets, and forests, surmounted by a fantastically-formed rock, that is the Col de Jamant. The others are the Moine and the Naze.’

This was spoken rapidly and in excellent English, albeit the intonation and accent had a decidedly foreign ring.

‘Thank you very much,’ said Randle, turning to the speaker, whom he was surprised, now he looked at him, not to have noticed before; for his appearance was rather striking.

Tall, and rather slightly built, a nut-brown beard hung low on his breast. He had regular features, but a complexion almost devoid of colour, and his eyes were so dark that the pupils of them could hardly be distinguished from the iris. When he smiled he displayed a row of brilliantly white teeth, the upper parts of two of which were covered or adorned with

two thin crescent-shaped plates of gold. The face seemed to Randle, albeit its owner was evidently little older than himself, that of a man who had suffered. It showed much power and courage, yet it wore, when in repose, an expression of wistful sadness which both won Randle's sympathy and roused his curiosity. What could have happened to this man, still in the heyday of youth, to stamp his features with as deep a shade of melancholy as if he had drunk the cup of life's bitterness to the dregs?

These thoughts passed rapidly through Randle's mind as he gazed in the direction indicated by the stranger.

‘And that point in the far distance, right away to the south, slightly powdered with snow?’

‘That is the beginning of the St. Bernard range. One of the lower spurs—I have heard the name often enough, but just now I cannot recall it.’

‘Thank you very much. It is of no importance. You have told me more already than I shall probably remember. You seem to be well acquainted with this part of the country?’

‘Yes, I like it. I often make the tour of the lake.’

‘I am not surprised at that, if you live in the neighbourhood. If I lived hereabouts I think I should always be on the water—in weather of this sort, pretty often in it. I suppose you are Swiss.’

‘I have not the privilege, for it is a privilege, to be a native of the freest of European countries. It was my misfortune to be born in Russia, where there is no freedom, neither in fact nor in name.’

‘Oh, you are a Russian. No, I do not suppose there is too much liberty in the dominion of the Czar, though, to own the truth, Russia is not a country I know much about.’

‘That is well for you. Fuller knowledge of the country would not tend to increase either your respect for it or for human nature. Russia is a prey to tyranny. Its masses are sordidly ignorant. Its upper classes either frivolous or corrupt; the few who dare to utter a word of remonstrance, or point out the way to reform, are sent into exile or consigned to a dungeon.’

This was spoken with much warmth, yet the

stranger's mobile face and kindling eye were even more eloquent of indignation and disgust than his words.

‘I could a tale unfold,’ he continued more quietly; ‘but I must not; I am under a promise. I must correct you on one point, however. You called me just now a Russian. I am not a Russian.’

‘I beg your pardon, but I thought you said you were born in Russia?’

‘So I was, yet I am no Russian. I have abjured my nationality. My country has cast me off, so I cast it off. I have no country; I am a cosmopolitan, a citizen of the world. Do you mark how the vast volume of the Rhone rushes, arrow-like into the lake, and changes in a moment its turbid whiteness into translucent blue? A curious sight, is it not? Let us go nearer the stern that we may have a better view of it.’

It was a curious sight, and interested Randle greatly; but his curiosity was less piqued by the natural phenomenon to which the citizen of the world called his attention than by the startling way in which that gentleman, without

pause or change of voice or any apparent reason whatever, had gone, metaphorically speaking, from Russia to the Rhone.

‘They say,’ continued the stranger, as Randle and he crossed the deck, ‘that the lake is blue because the river is white ; that the colouring matter which gives the water its beautiful tint is contained in the powdered rock ground by the glaciers and brought down by the stream. I daresay there is some truth in the theory, for no lakes that I know of, fed by springs or clear streams, are blue as Lake Lemman is blue.’

‘It is perhaps the mingling together of “glacier milk” and clear water—there are clear streams flowing into the lake, I suppose—that produce the colour.’

‘That is very likely, I should think. And now’ (lowering his voice and giving a glance over his shoulder), ‘I suppose you would like to know why I changed the subject of our conversation so very abruptly. It was very kind of you to take the hint. You followed my cue admirably.’

‘I followed you, if I did not follow your cue,’ replied Randle, with a smile. ‘I did think it

rather strange, but I presumed you had a reason.'

'I had. Did you observe that man who came and sat down near to us and pretended to be reading a newspaper?'

'Do you mean that stout little fellow with a game eye and a bottle nose?'

'Exactly. Well, unless I am much mistaken, that fellow is a spy.'

'God bless me, a spy?' returned Randle, considerably astonished. 'Spies in this country! Why, you said just now that Switzerland was the freest of European countries.'

'So it is. But that man is a Russian, not a Swiss, spy. He is a servant of His Imperial Majesty the Autocrat of All the Russians, King of Poland, Duke of Finland, and I don't know what besides. You are perhaps not aware that the Russian Government have a regular police bureau at Geneva, and a full staff of detectives, whose chief—I should rather say sole—duty it is to watch the poor fellows who eat here the bitter bread of exile—men most of them of whom their country was not worthy—until it shall please Heaven——. But, see, that cursed

mouchard is creeping round this way. Let us promenade round the deck awhile, and when we pass him I will change the subject.'

'Do you know the man?'

'I never saw him before in my life, but he has been described to me by those who know him only too well. Besides, I recognise *mouchards* the moment I set eyes on them. An unerring instinct tells me when I am in their presence. I believe I could scent them in the dark. I remember once at St. Petersburg——. Yes, that is Chillon Castle. You remember Byron:—

"Lake Lemán lies by Chillon's walls ;
A thousand feet in depth below
Its massy waters meet and flow ;
Thus much the fathom-line was sent
From Chillon's snow-white battlement
Which round about the wave entralls."

'Snow-white battlements ! That is poetic license, I suppose ? A dirty yellow I call them.'

'You are too matter-of-fact, Monsieur l'Anglais. You forget that poets view things through a medium of their own. What is imagination worth if it cannot transmute dirty yellow into snow white ?'

'Especially when dirty yellow will not scan.'

Yellow will, though, and it would not sound badly either.

“From Chillon’s yellow battlement.”’

‘Perhaps it was really snow white when Byron saw it. Let us suppose so. You were saying that once at St. Petersburg——?’

‘Yes, I was going to tell you of a little adventure I once had with a spy—one of many ; a trifling incident enough in itself, but it will serve to show you how wary one has to be. I was on my way to a secret printing-office with some manuscript in my pocket, a little matter I had written for distribution among the peasants, in which I tried to show how greatly their economical condition was susceptible of improvement, and to explain what is meant by constitutional government, and to set forth its advantages. There was nothing alarming in it—no advocacy of violence or revolution ; but no printer could have printed it openly without the risk—the certainty rather—of having his establishment shut up by the police and being himself imprisoned, and, as likely as not, sent off to Siberia. So I had to take my manuscript to a

clandestine office belonging to the political society of which I was a member. I did not go the most direct way, as you may suppose. I was already suspected of revolutionary tendencies—in other words, of entertaining doubts as to whether ours was the best of all possible governments, and the Czar an earthly deity—and I knew the police had their eye on me. Well, I had not gone far when I saw before me a man in the dress of a peasant, looking through a shop window. There was nothing unusual in this, and the fellow had the appearance of a real moujik; but I felt at once—something told me—that he was a spy, and had been sent to watch me. I knew that unless I could get rid of him it would be madness to go to the printing-office, and I wanted particularly to go; not so much about my “copy,” which could wait, as that I expected to find a friend there whom I wanted to see. I had heard he was in danger of arrest, and it was necessary to warn him. So I resolved on a bold stratagem. Instead of trying to dodge my *mouchard*—an attempt in which I should probably have failed—I spoke to him, asked him if he wanted a job. He pre-

tended to 'be very much delighted at the idea, and said he would be glad to do anything for me. Then I walked on and told him to follow me, looking ever and anon over my shoulder, as if I were in dread of being followed. Telling the man to wait outside I went into a café which had the reputation of being frequented by revolutionary characters. I looked about me as if I expected to find somebody, and then with a gesture of disappointment called for pen and paper and wrote a note. I knew, of course, that my spy was carefully scanning all my movements through the window. After sealing, not simply gumming, my letter—it was merely an invitation to dinner and a word or two in cypher—I went outside, gave it to the false peasant with a handsome gratuity, told him to take it to its destination, and bring me back an answer. Then I re-entered the café, but the moment he was out of sight I ran to the printing-office, gave in my copy, spoke a few words to my friend, and then walked quickly home.'

'Are you sure the man was a spy? I don't think he was very sharp to let you get rid of him so easily.'

‘I don’t think he was. Spies are often very stupid people, I think. But you see this fellow fancied he would find valuable information in that letter, and was in a hurry to turn it to account.’

‘Did he deliver it?’

‘Oh, yes, after it had been opened and read.’

‘You saw the seal had been tampered with, I suppose?’

‘Yes, and very clumsily tampered with.’

‘So there was no mistake about the fellow’s being a spy?’

‘None. He was that and more.’

‘That and more—what do you mean?’

‘He was a traitor,’ said the Russian, savagely, his face darkening with a look of hatred that made Randle shudder. ‘My friend recognised him as one of ours. He had been affiliated to the society at Kieff, and entered the service of the police at St. Petersburg, where he thought nobody knew him, the hound. But Paul Demidoff saw through his designs at once, and——’

‘What became of him?’ asked Randle, seeing that the Russian did not seem disposed to complete the sentence.

‘Became of whom—Paul Demidoff?’

‘No, of the spy.’

‘He was found a few days afterwards in the Neva with a bullet in his brain,’ said the Russian, speaking slowly and almost in a whisper.

‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed Randle, with a horror-struck look, ‘you don’t mean that you——’

‘Oh dear, no,’ rejoined the other, indifferently. ‘I had nothing to do with it. I only read of the incident in the newspapers. I would not have soiled my hands by touching the wretch. But—ah, here is Montreux and Glion; a little further on is Clarens.

“Clarens! sweet Clarens, birthplace of deep love!
Thine air is the young breath of passionate thought;
Thy trees take root in love; the snows above
The very glaciers have his colours caught.”

‘Byron again! You are better up in Byron than I am. I have dipped into his poems from time to time, but I never studied them, or got “Childe Harold” off by heart, as you seem to have done.’

‘I can easily believe that Byron is not esteemed by his countrymen as he deserves, and

unless I am greatly at fault he is much more read abroad than at home—perhaps because he is the poet of freedom and passion, and of the little respect he shows for the great ones of the earth. Freedom you English have in a great measure gained, and are, therefore, no longer enthusiastic about it—though you are not quite so free as you sometimes think yourselves—and passion and irreverence are qualities that do not command your admiration. You are too respectable and conventional. But Byron is the poet of peoples who are fighting for freedom. How often in our secret midnight meetings have we repeated those magnificent lines of his that might have been written for Russia:—

“ Yet, Freedom! yet thy banner, torn, but flying,
Streams like the thunderstorm against the wind;
Thy trumpet voice, though broken now and dying,
The loudest still the tempest leaves behind;
Thy tree hath lost its blossoms, and its rind,
Chopp'd by the axe, looks rough and little worth,
But the sap lasts—and still the seed we find
Sown deep, even in the bosom of the North;
So shall a better spring less bitter fruit bring forth.”

The stranger began the stanza in rather a

low voice, but as he went on his excitement increased, and he repeated the last two or three lines in a style that made everybody look at him.

‘You are forgetting the spy,’ whispered Randle, who was beginning to feel much interested in his new acquaintance.

‘He will not know that I am quoting Byron, and if he does it is of no importance. But I have thought of a way of getting rid of him. We shall be at Vevey in a few minutes.’

‘How?’

‘You will see. Only one thing—take as a matter of course anything I may do.’

‘All right. Do you suppose he knows English?’

‘Certainly. You may be sure the Russian Government would not go to the expense of sending—how do you say it?—duffers to Geneva. It would be too costly, and useless as that, as the Americans say.’

‘How well you speak English! I quite envy your command of languages.’

‘As to my command of languages, there is nothing extraordinary in that—my own, that

goes without saying ; and besides that, German, French, and a little Italian. German and French we learnt from our governesses without knowing that we were learning. English is my second mother tongue, for my mother was half English, and we had also an English governess. So if I did not know well your tongue I should be a very stupid fellow.'

'You have been in England, of course?'

'Never. But I hope—ah, here we are at Vevey. I will now put my little plan into execution. If you do not object, we will resume our conversation afterwards.'

And then the citizen of the world took off his hat, spoke a few words in French, and joined the throng of passengers who were hurrying across the gangway to the landing stage.

'Why, he has gone,' said Randle to himself. 'I never knew such a thing in my life. How can he resume the conversation? I suppose that gibberish was meant for good-bye. Ah, he was right about that fellow, after all; he is landing too. How will he get rid of him, I wonder?'

By this time the Russian was on the landing

stage, and catching Randle's eye took off his hat a second time. Randle did the same. Then passengers began to come on board. When the last of them had embarked, and just as the men were beginning to unship the gangway, the Russian, who was a little beyond the supposed spy, whipped quickly round, and the next moment had regained the deck. The spy would have followed, but he was too late. Just as he put his foot on the gangway, the men, who had not seen him, pushed it back, the steamer began to move, and the *mouchard*, losing his balance, went head-foremost into the water. Then ensued a terrible commotion; everybody ran to and fro, shouted vociferously, and told everybody else what to do without doing anything himself. If a lad who was fishing had not thrust into the man's hands a rod by which he held on until picked up by a small boat, he might have been drowned, for he did not seem to have much swim in him. The steamer stopped for a few minutes, but when the captain saw that the fellow was in safety he sang out '*En route*,' the French equivalent for 'Go ahead,' an order that was promptly obeyed.

‘That is better than I bargained for,’ said the Russian to Randle. ‘I meant to give him the slip, but I had no idea that he would take an involuntary header into the lake. It might have been better, though.’

‘How?’

‘He might have been drowned.’

‘Do you mean that you would have let him drown?’

‘My dear sir, I would not have raised a finger to help him,’ said the other, fiercely. ‘If I had the power, I would drown every spy in existence—at any rate every Russian spy. You are shocked, I can see; but if you only knew what I—what some have suffered, you would not be surprised.’

‘Why was this man following you—have you any idea?’

‘I suppose he has been ordered by the Third Section to write a report about me. They very likely want to know how I am spending my time—what I am doing, with whom I associate, and, above all, if I meddle in any way with politics. These gentlemen of the Third Section are very curious, I assure you.’

‘But are all Russian gentlemen on their travels followed about in this way? It must take quite an army of spies, to say nothing of the expense.’

‘Oh dear, no, not all. Only a few of us are honoured in this way. Why I am one of the select few I may some time tell you—if we should ever meet again.’

‘And if you come to England, as I think you said a little while ago you intended to do, we may meet again.’

‘I am sure it would afford me much pleasure. Yes, I mean to visit England. I want to see the country, and I am particularly anxious to study the condition of the people.’

‘Do you mean of the working classes?’

‘I do. The *proletariat*—peasants and people who live from hand to mouth. The highly educated, and what you call the upper classes, are pretty much alike everywhere; they are too monotonous. I don’t care for them, and the *bourgeoisie* I detest. Traders, mammon worshippers, and such like, I have no sympathy with whatever; their lives are unlovely and their characters uninteresting.’

‘Is not that rather a hard judgment?’ said Randle, with a smile. ‘My character may be uninteresting—I daresay it is; but I know some traders who are men of most original character. And, though the lives of some of us are unlovely in all conscience, that cannot truthfully be said of all. Besides, a trader is not necessarily a mammon-worshipper.’

‘You speak warmly. I fear I have hurt your feelings. If so, I am very sorry; but I had really no idea you were a——’

‘Mammon-worshipper. Well, I hope I am not. Nevertheless, I am a trader, or, at least, a manufacturer, which is pretty much the same thing.’

‘I was thinking of people who merely traded, who created nothing. A manufacturer creates, and if he does not *exploite* his employés he may be a useful member of society and worthy of all respect.’

‘Well, I don’t think we *exploite* our employés, if by that you mean getting all we can out of our hands, paying them the lowest wages they can be persuaded or forced to take, and then letting them go to the devil, if they are so

mined. That is not our way, though I am sorry to say it is the way of some. But come and see for yourself. You will find some things to blame, but many things, I hope, to praise. And as to character, you will find as much originality among our Lancashire folks as in any part of England, perhaps more.'

'You are from Lancashire, then? You are right; it is socially the most interesting part of England. It is there, is it not, that the associative spirit among artisans has reached its highest development, where the system of co-operation both in production and distribution has been most successful? I thank you very much for your invitation. I accept it. I certainly will come.'

'But you must know where to come. See, I have written my address on this card.'

'Thank you. "Mr. Randle Ryvington, Whitebrook, Lancashire." I suppose I shall easily find Whitebrook—there is a railway?'

'Oh, you will find it right enough. Make for Manchester, and then ask for a ticket for Whitebrook; that is all you have to do.'

'And when I arrive at your station I will de-

mand to be directed to the house of Mr. Randle Ryvington?

‘No, I would not advise you to do that. Ask which is the way to “Red Ryvington’s,” or better still take a cab and drive there.’

‘But here on the card is the name of Mr. Randle Ryvington, and you say ask for “Red Ryvington”—that is rather droll, is not?’

‘I daresay you find it so; but the fact is I am better off than some people. I have two names—that given me by my godfathers and godmother, and a post-baptismal one, by which I am best known in the town and district of Whitebrook; and as I am not the only Randle Ryvington it is rather a convenience than otherwise.’

‘Ah, I see,’ said the Russian, albeit he still seemed somewhat puzzled. ‘I will write “Red Ryvington” on the back of the card, so that I may not forget it. And now permit me to give you my card.’

It bore merely two words, ‘Sergius Kalouga.’

‘Being, as I have already mentioned, a wanderer, a sort of cosmopolitan vagabond,’ continued Kalouga, ‘I have no fixed address.’

My home is wherever I happen to be. At present it is at Divonne, a hydropathic establishment not far from Nyon, where I am making a cure of water.'

'Nyon! Why, that is where I am going.'

'Indeed! I fancied you were going to Geneva.'

'I may afterwards, then on to Lausanne, but only to pass through on my way home. I must get back to my mammon-worshipping, you know,' laughed Randle.

'Come now, Mr. Ryvington, that is too bad. I never said you were a mammon-worshipper; and I am sure you are not one. You have not the air.'

'Thank you, Mr. Kalouga. I hope I have not the reality either. But about Nyon. Do you know a house there called—let me see—Villa Artemisia?'

'Yes, I pass it in driving to Divonne.'

'Well, I have to make a call there. Perhaps you will be good enough to point it out to me?'

'With pleasure. I will, if it please you, do more. A carriage waits me near the landing

stage. You shall go with me as far as the Villa Artemisia, and I will put you down at the gate. It is a *pensionnat des demoiselles*, is it not? At least, I often see some very charming young ladies walking about.'

'Yes, it is a young ladies' boarding-school, and I am going to see one of them.'

'Your sister, probably?'

'No; the young lady I am going to see is not my sister. She——'

'*Tant mieux*—so much the better. You are in luck, Monsieur Ryvington. I congratulate you. But here we are at Nyon. If you have any baggage you would do well to look after it, I think.'

CHAPTER IX.

VILLA ARTEMISIA.

VILLA ARTEMISIA was a large, old-fashioned house, with high-pitched roof, tall chimneys, rounded corners; and at one side rose a nondescript sort of thing bearing a faint resemblance to a tower. It was embowered in trees, and its general appearance was rather suggestive of a castle, or a baronial hall of stunted growth, than an educational establishment, and before Mademoiselle Vieutemps turned it into a ladies' boarding-school, and changed its name to Villa Artemisia, it had been known in the neighbourhood as the Château de la Roche. Beautifully situated on the summit of a gentle acclivity, it commanded a superb view of the lake, the mountains of Faucigny, and the Pen-

nine Alps, with the rocky ramparts of the Jura for background.

‘You will not forget your promise?’ said Randle, as Kalouga put him down at the outer gate of Villa Artemisia.

‘I will not forget. You may count on seeing me sooner or later, and rather sooner than later, at Whitebrook. *Au revoir*. I wish I was going to visit a beautiful young lady.’

‘*Au revoir*,’ said Randle, and opening the gate he walked briskly up the fine avenue of chestnut-trees that led to the villa, while the Russian drove rapidly towards Divonne.

When Randle arrived at the house he rang the bell, and, handing his card to the smart *bonne* who answered his summons, demanded an interview with Miss Dora Ryvington.

‘Perfectly. monsieur,’ said the girl. ‘Will monsieur give himself the trouble to enter.’

Randle entered accordingly, and presently found himself in a room quaint as the house itself, and very charming. There were two windows at each end, reaching from floor to ceiling. One set looked into a garden, gay with flowers and rich with trailing vines and

heavily laden fruit-trees; the other looked over the lakes, the mountains, and the Alps. A few old pictures, the subjects mostly rural, hung on the walls. The furniture, all of antique design, was upholstered in crimson cloth, and the dark oaken floor so brightly polished that walking across it, for the unpractised, was quite a risky undertaking. The tables, the nick-nacks on them, the cabinets, the clock on the mantelpiece, the mirrors, more numerous than the pictures, were in perfect keeping. The only modern thing in the room was the piano: for the books, albeit the literary part of them was comparatively modern, were bound in old-fashioned style to match the furniture.

Randle sat down in a *fauteuil* and took up one of the books in which he soon became so absorbed that he did not notice the opening of the door; and on hearing an eager, silvery voice speak his name, he looked round in momentary surprise.

‘Randle!’

‘Dora!’

Then he rose, took both the girl’s hands in his and gave her a cousinly kiss.

‘How well you are looking, Dora. Why, I do believe you have grown.’

There was no mistake about her looking well. She looked bright and happy too, and delighted at seeing her cousin. Dora was eighteen, tall and sylph-like. Face and head rather small, but exquisitely formed. Dark hair, rich complexion, small mouth, a good nose, yet perhaps a little too large to be in perfect keeping with the rest of her features, and large grey eyes, full of fire and animation.

‘Do you think so? Well, you are quite right,’ said Dora, giving a fleeting glance at herself in one of the many mirrors that adorned the walls. ‘I have had to let my frocks out a full inch since I came here, and I do believe I am growing yet. I am so glad; I want to be tall. How are they all at home?’

‘Very well, when I heard last. But I dare-say your news is later than mine.’

‘I had a letter yesterday. Nothing new except that either Randle or papa is coming for me next year.’

‘Then I suppose you are perfect in French?’

‘Oh dear, no, not perfect. One may easily

know French pretty well, but to learn it perfectly, to be able to write a good style without faults, is extremely difficult. What do you think Professor Maigre said to me yesterday? and he thought he was paying me a compliment, poor man. He said if Mademoiselle Reevington would stay in Switzerland one more year and talk and write during that time nothing but French, she would know the language *passablement pour une anglaise!*

‘Not very flattering, I must say. But you will know enough to pass muster at Whitebrook.’

‘Whitebrook! I should think so indeed. Why, who is there at Whitebrook except Monsieur Hubert and his daughter that can speak French fluently? And though I cannot write to satisfy Monsieur Maigre I speak it easily and *presque sans accent, je t’assure.*’

‘You must not despise Whitebrook folks, Dora. You know you are one of them, though you do live at Deepdene.’

‘You quite mistake me, Ran; it is not that at all. I am not proud, I despise nobody. I like the farmers and people about Deepdene,

and the factory folks at Whitebrook, but some of the masters I do not like at all; they are vulgar, purse-proud, and pretentious.'

'Not all, Dora; not all.'

'I did not say all. I only said some; and I think the brewers, rich as they are, are worse than the manufacturers and shopkeepers.'

'Why, Dora, what books have you been reading—where have you got your ideas? You might have been talking with Mr. Kalouga.'

'Mr. Kalouga, who is he? But here comes Mademoiselle Vieutemps; you must be very polite to her,' whispered the girl to Randle, as the schoolmistress entered the room.

Whereupon the cousin made a profound bow, which the lady acknowledged with a courtly *révérence*.

Mademoiselle Vieutemps was about sixty years old, *petite* as touching her person, yet with enough of vigour for a person half her age. Though her hair was almost white, her fresh and rosy face showed hardly a wrinkle; and her keen, dark eyes could still read a character and detect a fault of French composition at a glance. Her toilette was perfection. As

Randle said to himself, she looked like a picture, and ought to have been kept in a gold frame.

‘I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr Ryvington,’ she said, out of consideration for her guest speaking the best English she could muster. ‘I hope you find your sister looking good?’

‘Dora is——’

Here Dora, who was behind Mademoiselle Vieutemps, gave Randle a glance which it was impossible to misunderstand, even if she had not supplemented it by placing her finger on her lips.

So instead of saying ‘Dora is not my sister,’ as he was about to do, he said, ‘Dora is looking remarkably well, Mademoiselle Vieutemps, as I was just telling her; and no wonder, for the Villa Artemisia must be as healthy as its situation is superb.’

‘Yes, as you say, monsieur, the situation is superb,’ answered the schoolmistress, evidently much pleased with the compliment, ‘and all my girls do enjoy the very best of health. And your sister does not fret for her home; she is very happy and *mignonne*, very darling, we

all do love her very much ; is it not so, *ma fille chérie.*'

'And I love you very much, dear Mademoiselle Vieutemps. I shall be glad to go home, because home is always home, you know, but I do not think I shall ever in all my life be so happy as I have been at Villa Artemisia ; and if papa will let me I shall come and see you every year.'

'And you will always be very welcome, my cabbage,' said the old lady, pinching the girl's fresh smooth cheek with her little white hand. 'Do you make a long sojourn at Nyon, Monsieur Ryvington?'

'No. I must go on to-night, either to Geneva or Lausanne. In three or four days from this I should like to be at home.'

'In that case you will have to leave by the half-past eight o'clock train. But we cannot let you go without offering you of our hospitality. I will order a little *gouté*' (a light repast) 'for you. It shall be ready in an hour ; that will leave you plenty of time. Meanwhile, Dora will perhaps show you round our grounds, let you see our vineyards and orchards, and take

you for a little promenade in the village.'

'May I, mademoiselle?'

'*Parfaitement.* Why not?'

'A thousand thanks, mademoiselle. I will run and put on my hat. I shall not keep you waiting three minutes, Ran.'

CHAPTER X.

DORA.

DORA was as good as her word, and, before Mademoiselle Vieutemps had finished the little speech descriptive of the beauties of Villa Artemisia and its eminent suitability for a *pensionnat*, the young lady returned to the room, hatted and gloved.

‘I always keep my word, Ran,’ she said. ‘I am ready.’

‘Yes, Mademoiselle Dora, you are always very *ponctuel*. And as your brother has so little of time at his disposition, and the repast I have ordered will soon be ready, you would do well to make your walk at once. It would be very sad if he were to depart without well seeing our vast and beautiful *campagne*.’

‘Why didn’t you want me to say I was not

your brother?' asked Randle, as soon as they were outside.

'Don't you know? Why, mademoiselle would not have let us be alone for three minutes; while as to walking with you *tête-à-tête*, she would rather have perished than permitted such a thing.'

'But why?'

'It is their way here. And the French are stricter than the Swiss; and mademoiselle is French, you know. She would never think of letting the biggest girls in the school, even two together, leave the grounds unaccompanied by herself, a teacher, or a *bonne*. And it is not considered proper for a young girl to speak to a male cousin in the street if she happen to meet him alone; she must just nod and move on.'

'That is absurd enough. At least it seems so, according to our English notions. But will not mademoiselle be annoyed when she knows what our relationship really is? I would not like to vex the old lady.'

'Don't fidget; I will tell her afterwards. When it is done it will be all right, though she

could not give her consent beforehand. She knows that English ideas in these matters are much less rigid than French ; and when I assure her that aunt, or mamma, if she had been living, would have let me go out for a walk with my cousin, I do not think she will be angry. She is a dear, good creature. And now, give an account of yourself. Where have you been for the last three or four weeks, and what have you been doing ?

‘Generally, knocking about in Switzerland. To descend to particulars, I have done the Wetterhorn, the Matterhorn, the Galenstock, Naegeli’s Graetli, Mount Pilatus, and a variety of [smaller mountains. I have walked a good many score miles, visited Basle, Berne, Zurich, Lucerne, Thun, and Interlaken, and saved, or been the means of saving, the life of an earl’s daughter, and made the acquaintance of a Russian revolutionist.’

‘Oh, how nice ! But never mind about Matterhorn, Wetterhorn, and the other horns ; tell me about saving the earl’s daughter.’

‘What a brave, noble fellow you are, Ran,’ said Dora, looking at him admiringly when he

had told her the story, in which, as she discerned, he had spoken very modestly of his own part in it. 'I knew you were brave and good, but I did not know how brave and good. And now you must tell me more about Lady Muriel Avalon. How old is she! Is she pretty?'

'About your age—seventeen or eighteen. Yes, I think you would call her pretty.'

'But give me a description of her. Is she tall or short, slim or stout? Tell me all about her this minute. If she is not good-looking, I shall be dreadfully disappointed.'

'Well, she is slim, but neither tall nor short—rather between the two; though, if she be as young as I take her to be, she may grow a little yet.'

'Come, go on. What sort of hair has she? What sort of a face?'

'Her hair is chestnut, complexion likewise. Eyes brown and soft, with very long lashes: face oval, nose rather aquiline, dimpled chin, rosy mouth, and lofty forehead. Altogether, I should pronounce her a handsome, high-bred girl.'

'I knew it,' said Dora, with a merry laugh.

‘I knew it from the first. One never reads of plain girls being rescued, though I am sure I do not know why. Well, Ran, the next thing is for you to marry her.’

‘I marry Lady Muriel Avalon!’ exclaimed Randal, looking as much surprised as if the possibility of such a consummation had been absolutely strange to his thoughts. ‘How very absurd! What could put such an idea into your head, Dora?’

‘Everything. What could be more natural? You have saved her life. The least she can do is to give you her hand. Besides, it would only be—what do you call it?—poetic justice. When a lady is rescued by a gentleman, it seems the proper thing for her to marry her deliverer.’

‘But suppose the gentleman is bespoke, Dora?’

‘Are you bespoke, Ran?’ said Dora, with an arch look.

Randle laughed.

‘I know you are not. You are only joking. Now, pay attention to what I say. You must marry Lady Muriel. Think what an honour

it would be to have an earl's daughter in the family! Why, you would be the greatest man in Whitebrook. You might get into Parliament, and I don't know what besides.'

'All very fine, Dora; but suppose the daughter is not willing, and the father objects to her marrying a manufacturer—what then?'

'No fear about the daughter. She is in love with you already, take my word for it. I know girls better than you do, which is only natural, seeing that I am a girl myself. As for the father, I really don't see why he should object. You have placed him under a great obligation. We Ryvingtons are at least respectable; and papa and my brother, you know, have found out that ours is one of the oldest families in the kingdom. And really, Ran, I do not see that because a man happens to be an earl he is better than anybody else. Why should he be?'

'Why, you said only just now what an honour it would be to have an earl's daughter in the family.'

'Well, so it would, in the eyes of the world. But, really, you know, it would amount to

very little. Lady Muriel would not make you a better wife, love you more, or make you any happier, simply because she happens to have a title, than if she were plain Miss Muriel.'

'That is exactly what I think myself, Dora. She might even make me a worse wife on that account. No, Dora, when I have made up my mind to marry, I shall look nearer home.'

'I hope you are not thinking of me, Ran, because, if you are, I tell you frankly you have no chance,' said Dora, with a mischievous look at her cousin.

'Why, what have I done to offend you, Dora? Or perhaps you do not think I would make you a good husband?'

'On the contrary, I think you would make the best in the world. You are as good as gold. That is just it; you are too good. The man I fall in love with—and, unless I fall in love, I shall not marry—must be just a little bit wicked—a dare-devil, dark-complexioned, piratical kind of a man, you know.'

'What! have you been reading Byron?'

'How did you know? A little. His memory

is greatly honoured in these parts. He and Rousseau together made the Lake Lemman famous, they say; and there is a copy of his poems in almost every house—at any rate of “Childe Harold” and the “Prisoner of Chillon.” We have been reading them aloud, and the “Corsair” and the “Bride of Abydos.”

‘Well, it is not exactly the sort of reading I should choose for a young ladies’ school,’ observed Randle.

‘We don’t use Byron’s poems for lesson-books, you old fogey; we read them, or rather such of them as mademoiselle allows—she is very strict, you know—amongst ourselves, when it rains, and that, and we cannot go out. But never mind Byron, tell me about the others.’

‘What others?’

‘Why, the Countess of Lindisfarne and the other daughters.’

‘What shall I tell you about them?’

‘How stupid you are, Ran! Or perhaps you had eyes for nobody but Lady Muriel. I only want to know how old they are, what they look like, and how they were dressed.’

‘Only! Good heavens, what an only! Well, I will do my best. Lady Lindisfarne is on the side of forty, but very well preserved, middle-sized, and rather stout, nose slightly hooked, eyes dark, hair ditto, and streaked with grey, full face, chin rather tending to double, complexion good, cheeks red, general expression masterful and decided, yet not ungenial.’

‘And what had she on?’

‘That you will have to guess, for if I might be shot this minute I could not tell you.’

‘Did she wear a hat?’

‘Yes, that I do remember, and a very ugly one it was—brim about a yard in circumference.’

‘Well, she is not my ideal of a countess—she is more like a duchess.’

‘Why?’

‘I always picture countesses as being tall, shapely, and haughtily handsome; duchesses as stout, hook-nosed, arrogant, and double-chinned. Now tell me about Lady Maude.’

‘Tall, plain-featured, sandy-haired, freckle-faced, and, as it seemed to me, rather proud and reserved.’

‘Jealous of her sister, perhaps.’

‘You absurd girl—what will you say next?’

‘I am sure I don’t know.’

‘I don’t think you do.’

‘Yes, I do, though. What is the other like—there is another, is there not?’

‘Yes, Lady Mary. Twelve years old, short-frocked, long-legged; and the child has a good face and pleasant ways. Anything else?’

‘Yes. Are there no sons?’

‘Two or three, I believe; but I may tell you at once that I know nothing about them. I heard just one mention of the boys, and I suppose the earl’s sons were the youngsters spoken of.’

‘That reminds me. I was forgetting about the earl. What is he like?’

‘A middle-aged gentleman of rather ungainly figure and homely countenance. Not very clever, I fancy, and a good deal led by his wife; but very courtly in manner, and, I should think, very kind-hearted.’

‘Now, I think that is all,’ answered Dora, thoughtfully. ‘You will go to Avalon Priory, of course?’

‘If they invite me, and I can find time.’

‘Find time! Of course you can, and if you cannot you must, if only that you may take notice what they wear and tell me afterwards.’

‘But you know I never do take notice what ladies wear,’ remonstrated Randle, rather alarmed at this suggestion; ‘or, if I do, I forget immediately afterwards. I could not possibly remember, Dora.’

‘That difficulty is easily got over,’ returned Dora, with one of her most mischievous glances, for she delighted in teasing her cousin. ‘You shall write every day and tell me everything; and then there will be no danger of your forgetting, you know. It will be so nice—almost as good as being at Avalon Priory oneself. You will now—won’t you—like a dear, good old Ran?’

‘I can try, you know,’ said Randle, dubiously, not feeling quite sure whether Dora was in jest or earnest; ‘but it will be time enough to think about that when I get my invitation. Who knows? It may never come.’

‘No fear of that. And now, tell me about your other adventure.’

‘What other adventure?’

‘With that Russian you spoke about.’

‘It was no adventure. I merely said that I had made the acquaintance of a Russian revolutionist on the steamer. We exchanged cards; see, here is his.’

‘Ah, Sergius Kalouga. How do you know he is a revolutionist?’

‘I gathered as much from his remarks, and then there was a spy following him.’

‘Oh, how romantic! Did the spy catch him?’

‘Not exactly. He caught the spy.’

‘Perhaps he is a Nihilist,’ observed Dora, thoughtfully, when Randle had told her of the disaster that befell the spy at Vevey.

‘Who—the spy?’

‘Of course not. How can the spy be a Nihilist? This M. Kalouga, of course.’

‘It is possible. But really I don’t know much about these Nihilists. What are they like?’

‘Like! Why, they are the most dreadful people in the world. Madame Vieutemps says they are worse than Thugs or cannibals. They

believe in nothing, and kill everybody they don't like.'

'I hope Kalouga is not one of them, for I have invited him to Whitebrook.'

'Oh, Ran, invite a Nihilist to Whitebrook! He will blow somebody up, or do something else equally dreadful.'

'Nonsense! Kalouga talks rather wildly at times, it is true, but he is no Nihilist.'

'I hope he is not, Ran, for all our sakes, if he goes to Whitebrook; but there are a great many of them about here. Is he very fierce-looking?'

'Quite the contrary, and very quiet and gentlemanly in manner; but I fancy he can be a good deal of a dare-devil if he likes. And, now I think of it, he has very dark eyes. Just a man after your own heart, I should think, Dora.'

'Thank you, cousin. My ideas have certainly enlarged since I came to Switzerland, but one must draw the line somewhere, and I draw it at Nihilists.'

'But I tell you Kalouga is not a Nihilist.'

'I am not at all sure about that, Randle.'

From your description, I rather think he is.'

'If you are at home when he comes to Whitebrook, I will introduce him to you, and then you may judge for yourself,' answered Randle, with a laugh.

'Thank you very much, Ran, but I don't want to be introduced to him. At any rate, you must have him searched first, to see that he has no dynamite or bomb-shells about him, and——'

'Here comes a young woman who wants to speak to you, I think, Dora.'

The young woman proved to be a *bonne* (servant), who came to announce that Monsieur Ryvington's repast was served, and that Mademoiselle Vieutemps awaited him in the dining-room.

CHAPTER XI.

ANOTHER PARTING.

THE cousins, in obedience to the summons conveyed by the *bonne*, returned to the house, and, when they entered the dining-room, found Mademoiselle Vieutemps at the head of the table, of which, on no consideration whatever, would she let anyone but herself do the honours.

‘By taking your repast now, Monsieur Ryvington,’ she observed, ‘you will have time to walk leisurely to the station, whither Dora can accompany you and make her last adieux. Did you show your brother the Promenade des Maronniers, *mignonne*?’

‘You mistake, mademoiselle,’ said Dora, demurely. ‘Randle is not my brother—he is my cousin.’

‘*Quelle horreur !*’ exclaimed the schoolmistress, falling back in her chair as if she were going to faint, her face expressive of the deepest dismay. ‘*Mais, mon Dieu*, mademoiselle, this is too much. Did you not tell me this gentleman was your brother ; and you, monsieur, did you not say that Mademoiselle Ryvington was your sister ?’

‘Neither one nor the other, Mademoiselle Vieutemps,’ said Dora, coolly. ‘He was announced as Mr. Randle Ryvington.’

‘Very well ; Mr. Randle Ryvington is your brother, your only brother, as you have often told me.’

‘So he is, and my cousin too.’

‘Pray be serious, mademoiselle. This is an affair very grave, I assure you. Do not attempt any *calembours* or *mauvaises plaisanteries*—any ill-timed jokes—if you please. How can this gentleman be at the same time your brother and your cousin ? You mock me ; you amuse yourself at my expense, Mademoiselle Dora.’

‘I beg your pardon, Mademoiselle Vieutemps ; I did not say that he was.’

‘But, Mademoiselle Dora, what mean you ?’

You will tell me next that I have no ears. Did I not this moment hear you say so ?

‘I said that Randle Ryvington was my cousin, and I said that Randle Ryvington was my brother, and what I said was true.’

‘Excuse me, Mademoiselle Dora, that *cannot* be true—it is impossible—it is a thing unheard of. But I see how it is ; you are making a little joke. He is all the time your brother. Are you not, Monsieur Ryvington ?’

‘I am her cousin, as she says,’ answered Randle, who thought the mystification had gone far enough. ‘Yet she is quite right. Her brother, my cousin, bears the same name as myself. She has, therefore, a brother Randle and a cousin Randle.’

‘Oh, *méchante*, to deceive me in such a fashion,’ said the schoolmistress, shaking her finger, but not unkindly, at Dora. ‘What would monsieur your father say if he knew ? And it is not *convenable*—it is not *comme il faut*—what do you say ? Proper ! It is not proper for a young girl to take walks *tête-à-tête* with a young gentleman, though he is her cousin.’

‘Why, papa asked him to call, Mademoiselle

Vieutemps ; and as for talking *tête-à-tête*, Randle and I have walked *tête-à-tête* hundreds of times. You must remember that we are English, and English girls are not *jeunes filles*.'

'I daresay it is true,' observed Mademoiselle Vieutemps, thoughtfully. 'It is certainly to me altogether incomprehensible ; yet I have heard that such enormities are committed in England. Still, if I had known, Dora, you would not have walked out with your cousin alone. But you will promise me one thing, my cabbage—you will not let it be known that this gentleman is not your brother. The example would be frightful, it might demoralise the whole school. On this condition I think you may go with monsieur your cousin to the station to make your last adieux ; but Julie must accompany you both there and back. We are not in England, remember. How young girls who are allowed such liberties can possibly turn out well is to me absolutely incomprehensible—absolutely incomprehensible. But the English always were a people apart, and I suppose their way of bringing up their children is only in keeping with the national character.'

‘We have no reason to be dissatisfied with the results, I think—at least, so far as our girls are concerned,’ said Randle, who was not at all disposed to admit the superiority of the French system of girl training, which Mademoiselle Vienteemps seemed to take for granted; ‘I have not, it is true, seen much of continental young ladies; but I cannot admit that they are one whit better, or more modest, than our English maidens.’

If Randle had not feared to give offence, he would have said that the maidens of England were in every way superior to the *jeunes filles* of France.

Dora rewarded him with an approving glance.

‘It is very well of you, monsieur, to defend your country and your *compatriotes*; and it is only right that you should think highly of them; but you know our French proverb, *chacun à son goût*—everyone to his taste; and you must let an old woman retain her belief that the system under which she was brought up, and in which she tries to bring up the *jeunes filles* committed to her charge, is the best

possible—except perhaps for English girls, who are like none other.’

‘I do not know if you intend that as a compliment, mademoiselle,’ answered Randle, ‘but I take it as one. You are right. English girls are like none other.’

The repast over, Randle took leave of the schoolmistress, and Dora, followed by a servant, who, however, remained so far in the rear that they were practically as much *en tête-à-tête* as before, went with her cousin to the station. They walked slowly, and Dora had ample time to point out, and Randle to admire, the beauties of Nyon—its superb situation, its trees, terraces, and gardens, its quaint houses and Gothic towers, and the unrivalled views which it commanded. The evening was calm. The blue wavelets of the lake broke noiselessly at the foot of the hill on which Nyon sits enthroned. Fishermen’s boats, laden with lacustrine spoil, were returning slowly homewards; and a fleet of lateen-rigged barques, their wing-like sails bellying lazily to the dying breeze, were bearing up for Yvoire and Geneva. The sun, now low in the west, had veiled his face

behind a mass of trailing clouds which rose from the crest of Mont Reculet; and his mellowed rays shed on the green meadows and fragrant woods, the white villas and grey castles of the Savoyard shore, a golden glory; and made the wild desolation of the Pennine Alps and the eternal snows of Mont Blanc resplendent with a more than earthly beauty.

‘There is nothing like this at Whitebrook, Dora,’ said Randle, softly. ‘Do you think you can live contentedly in Lancashire after being so long in Switzerland?’

‘I shall regret Nyon often, no doubt. All my life long I shall think of it, and my stay here, with pleasure. But then you see, Ran, Lancashire is home, and Nyon is not. It might become so, though—any place might.’

‘How, Dora?’

‘Home is wherever the heart and affections are.’

‘And yours?’

‘Are going with you to Whitebrook, Ran.’

‘Where you will soon follow them,’ answered Randle, carelessly; for he saw in his cousin’s remarks nothing more than a confession of

girlish home-sickness, albeit the time came when they appeared to him in another light, and he saw in her words a deeper meaning. 'You are not alone in wanting something you do not possess. It is a very common complaint. When we are at home we want to be abroad, and when we are abroad we want to be at home. I only wish I could stay all the summer in Switzerland.'

'Why don't you, then?'

'What would become of the concern, I should like to know, if I were to stay away all summer? Since my father died the whole weight of it has rested on my shoulder—before he died, I might say, for he was ill several months. This is the first holiday I have taken since, and I feel that I have already been away too long.'

'There is Bob.'

'So there is, and he does not do amiss; but he is little more than a lad yet, remember.'

'That means, I suppose, that he is not much of a help to you.'

'Not much, though I manage him better than my father did, I fancy. He is a bit wild and harum-scarum at times, and my father was

afraid of trusting him, and did not give him much to do. That was a mistake. I act quite differently. I tell him a thing must be done, and make him responsible for the doing. Then he works and pays attention. When Bob is a little older, I think he will do very well. In fact, if he had not been shaping well of late, I could not have taken so long a holiday. But father and he never pulled very well together. I think Bob's occasional wildness rather frightened him. You know how very strict and old-fashioned in his ways and ideas my father used to be.'

'Bob and he were antipathetic, I suppose,' suggested Dora. 'They did not understand each other, and when people do not understand each other they are apt to get on badly. At least, that is what I was reading in a book.'

'The book is right, Dora. I daresay that is why your brother and I do not always get on very well together—we are antipathetic.'

'Then you and I must be sympathetic, Ran, for we always got on very well together,' observed Dora, with the gravity becoming the discussion of a somewhat metaphysical subject.

‘Exactly. And you and Bob always got on well together, I think.’

‘Always. I like Bob. Does not he come of age next year?’

‘Yes, early in June—the 5th, I think.’

‘I shall be at home then. What are you going to do?’

‘By way of keeping it up, you mean?’

‘Yes. You will have to give a dance, of course, and a treat to the hands.’

‘Really, I have hardly given the matter a thought yet. I don’t know about the dance; I am not sure that my mother would like it. The hands must, of course, have a treat. We shall see when the time comes. In any case we will not decide till you get back. I suppose you would like to have a finger in the pie?’

‘You must give a dance or something, and I should certainly like to have a finger in that pie; and I will make papa or Randle fetch me in May, so that I may be at home in good time. But here we are at the station. Don’t you think you had better take your ticket?’

‘Decidedly, and register my belongings, which I ordered to be sent here from the

landing-stage, if you will kindly excuse me a moment.'

Randle had hardly taken his ticket, watched the rather tedious operation of weighing his luggage, and obtained the voucher for it, when the whistle of the train was heard.

Three minutes later he was gone, and Dora was returning wistfully towards Villa Artemisia.

The *bonne* who formed Dora's escort, when talking next day with her fellow-servants, told how very fond Mademoiselle Ryvington was of her brother. She made her adieux without shedding a tear; but when the train was out of sight, and she no more waved her handkerchief, 'my faith how she wept,' said the girl, 'and she had such a headache afterwards that she could not come down to supper, and spent the rest of the evening all alone in her room.'

As for Randle, he sped towards Lausanne (if travelling by a Swiss train can be called speeding), whence he intended to proceed, viâ Pontarlier, to Paris, thinking sometimes of his business, sometimes of the girls he had left behind him. Though he had been greatly

struck by Lady Muriel Avalon, he did not feel as if he had lost his heart to her; and he had so long looked on Dora as a girl, that it did not occur to him she might have begun to feel and think as a woman.

CHAPTER XII.

AN OLD-FASHIONED FIRM.

A LONG, straggling, loose-jointed, monotonous manufacturing town in Mid-Lancashire—a multitude of chimneys, ‘tall as masts of some high admiral,’ tossing their smoke in the sombre air—a wilderness of streets and lanes, running in all directions until they are lost, miles away, in brick-fields and waste places. The streets, for the most part, except about the central square and the outskirts, are passages between gaunt and gloomy factories, foundries, machine-shops, and mean-looking cottages. Here and there is a sooty church, save for its stumpy steeple, hardly distinguishable from a warehouse, or slab-sided chapel of depressing aspect. Near the middle of the town is a space free from long chim-

neys, and occupied by the town hall, market-place, banks, and other buildings, which, if they were a little less dingy, might be deemed almost handsome. On the rising ground towards the north are clusters of comely villas, surrounded by gardens and embowered in trees ; and, beyond the chimneys and the smoke, the outlook is as picturesque and attractive as the town itself is ugly and repellent. Yet, unlovely as Whitebrook undoubtedly is, something may be urged in its behalf—it might be worse. There are places still less lovely. It is not, for instance, quite as dismal as Heywood, which has been aptly likened to a petrified funeral procession ; nor as hideous as Wigan, which could hardly be blacker if it had been quarried from its own coal measures ; nor as gloomy as Bolton, whose dingy buildings and cindered roads might well suggest the idea that the town is sorrowing for its sins in soot and ashes. And though the air of Whitebrook cannot truthfully be described as balmy, nor as reminding him who breathes it of Araby the Blest, it will compare favourably with that of a large town

in another part of the county, where, in a dry summer, the manufacturers are wont to fill their boilers and draw their supplies of condensing water from the main sewer.

Whitebrookers of this generation might also urge in extenuation of judgment that the town is pretty much as they found it, and that by far the greater part of it was in existence long before the æsthetic idea came into vogue, or sanitary science into being. They are, moreover, making creditable efforts to repair the faults of their forefathers, and the town is visibly, if very slowly, emerging from the condition of unredeemed ugliness in which it was so long content to abide.

The working people of Whitebrook are a sturdy, independent, and industrious race, somewhat lacking, perhaps, in sweetness and light, and too much given to quarrelling over their cups and punching each other's heads, but thoroughly in earnest, gifted with considerable shrewdness, and possessed of a rich store of mother wit. The masters are of all sorts, from the overlooker just starting for himself, who lives like one of his own hands, and makes

his lads work harder than hired servants, to the cotton lord who counts his looms by the thousand, and his spindles by the hundred thousand, educates his sons at Oxford, and his daughters at Paris, drops his *h*'s, and aspires to Parliamentary honours.

The Ryvingtons, though they were supposed to have some connection with Rivington Pike, had long flourished in Whitebrook. The first of them, according to the family tradition, settled in the town about the middle of the last century, when it was little more than a large village of timbered houses, clustering round the parish church in a green and shady valley, through which meandered the White Brook, the stream whence the place derives its name, at that time clear, if not white (some local archæologists hold that 'white,' in this case, is a corruption of 'wide'), and not, as now, of the consistency of porridge, and the colour of ink.

The first of the Whitebrook Ryvingtons was not supposed by his neighbours to have any ancestors to speak of, and he died in ignorance of the fact, discovered in a later age by one of

his descendants, that his name was one of the most illustrious in the North of England, and his house remotely akin to the royal race of Barbarossa. Seeing, however, that he was a hard-working draper in a small way of business, whose chief concern was to make both ends meet and bring up his family creditably, it may be questioned if the knowledge would have afforded him much satisfaction. A little legacy or a large order would have been more to the purpose. His son Randle, who succeeded him in the shop, was a shrewd and prosperous tradesman, who conceived the happy idea of himself manufacturing some of the goods in which he dealt. So he bought him yarn and gave it out to weave, manufacturing in those halcyon days being open to anybody who could hire a weaver or two and find a few cops and warps. Some of the pieces which he produced he sold in the grey, and acquired considerable local celebrity for the excellent quality of his bumps and sheetings; others he got bleached, and sold as shirtings or stuff for shifts. As his business increased he opened up a connection in Manchester, took his sons into partnership, and,

when he died, left his firm in good credit and his family in easy circumstances.

His descendants honoured the memory of their ancestor by making Randle a family name, and perpetuating the designation of Randle Ryvington and Sons, which he had bestowed upon the firm, a designation that after the lapse of a hundred years it still retains.

This Randle—Randle the first, he may be called—and the two sons that succeeded him—just and God-fearing men all of them—gave the house a character and a tone which it never lost. Their influence, as does that of most of us, either for good or for evil, lived after them. In disposition they were prudent and cautious, in their dealings honourable and straightforward. They were slow in adopting new inventions, deliberate in making changes, and looked with distrust on new-fangled ways. They clung to hand looms long after some of their neighbours were making fortunes by power looms; and adopted the innovation only when they saw it was an assured success. They were equally backward in substituting self-actors for hand mules, loose reeds for fast reeds, and two pick-

ing sticks for one. They never increased their business or put up a new building until the money was ready beforehand. They had always a balance at their bankers, and would rather have perished than have had anybody 'astride of the ridging' of house or factory.

'We should feel as if th' place was not our own if we parted with th' writing,' said a member of the firm one day to a neighbour who was talking about mortgaging his mill. 'I'd liefer sell it out and out, and be a tenant, than go on in th' name of owning a property as somebody could sell o'er my head.'

This was not the way to make a large fortune or build up a big business; and considering, further, that the Ryvingtons always divided their substance fairly among their children, making no difference between sons and daughters, it is not surprising that the 'concern,' as they always called it, did not equal in magnitude some establishments of much later growth, nor that, after several generations, they were rather well-to-do than wealthy.

But they had their compensations. They were free from the greatest of troubles that

can beset a business man—shortness of money. Even in the worst of times their credit was never questioned, nor their power of keeping their mills going and their people employed impaired. ‘Ryvingtons’ never either stopped or ran short time; and as they had no need to ‘grind’ their hands, always paid full wages, and used good cotton, they had rarely a turn-out. Their honesty was proverbial. They gave so full weight and measure, and were so correct in their accounts withal, that even the keenest buyers accepted their invoices without examination. They never tried to pass off faulty pieces as perfect. Goods in respect of which abatements had been made from the weaver’s wages were kept scrupulously apart and sold as ‘rejects.’ It was sometimes said that Ryvingtons’ ‘bates,’ as faulty goods are occasionally called, were better than some people’s ‘regulars.’ They paid their accounts to the day, and with those who did not treat them in like manner they would have nothing to do. It was a rigid rule of the concern to close the account of any buyer who, either by unpunctual payments or any other lapse, showed that he

was not careful to keep his engagements ; and, albeit by thus acting they lost a few good customers, they escaped bad debts and saved themselves an infinitude of worry.

It is hardly necessary to say that Ryvington and Sons had never anything to do with bills. They regarded them as an invention of the devil. Even when they imported cotton, which shippers invariably draw against at a usance of a certain number of days or months, the concern always took up the drafts under discount.

It is almost superfluous to say that a family firm so old-fashioned in their ways and ideas were orthodox in religion and conservative in politics. They were faithful, if not very ardent supporters of the Church as by law established ; and though they did not mix themselves up much in local matters, having generally other fish to fry, they always thought it their duty, when Whitebrook was contested, to place their vote and interest at the disposal of the Tory candidates.

As befitted their antiquity, there being no other family in the borough that could boast of

so long a pedigree, the Ryvingtons were somewhat reserved in their manner and exclusive in their choice of associates, holding themselves studiously aloof from new comers and upstarts. They made an exception, however, in favour of those of their old hands who had set up for themselves and seemed to be getting on. These they graciously patronised, and sometimes substantially helped.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE REDSCAR RYVINGTONS.

THE home of the Ryvingtons, though technically within the borough of Whitebrook, was some distance from the town proper. At the time of the first Reform Bill the parliamentary boundaries of the borough had been considerably broadened, and made to include a wide extent of open country. Redscar, as the place was called, lay in a little valley at the very extremity of the boundary. It was shut off from the town and sheltered from its smoke by an intervening wood-crowned hill. The situation had been chosen by the first Randle for its water privileges and other advantages, including proximity to a canal which, reaching as far as Wigan and Liverpool, formed, before the advent of railways, a medium for the

supplies of cotton and coal of inestimable value.

It goes without saying that the mills were near the canal. They formed a grotesque and rather confused mass of buildings—from the four-storeyed, narrow-windowed, ivy-mantled, weather-worn little factory, nearly a hundred years old, now used as a warehouse, to a modern loom shed with a glass roof, and a stately, six-storeyed, fireproof mill with a flat one, and windows evidently designed to justify the final cause of windows and give the utmost possible amount of light. But the wonder and triumph of Redscar was a most remarkable chimney, in shape and appearance rather resembling an Italian campanile than a Lancashire ‘luer,’ a chimney, strange to say, that never smoked. Careful observers averred that they could occasionally discern a cloud-like something hovering about the top of it; but even the most censorious admitted that this appearance was more like condensing steam than factory smoke, and that if all the chimneys in Whitebrook were fitted up on the same principle it would effect an immense improvement

in its aspect, and probably an important saving in the consumption of coal.

At right angles to the mills were two long rows of cottages, as old fashioned, some of them, as the factory of the first Randle, yet by no means bad dwellings, since, having been built with 'shops' for the reception of hand looms, they were more roomy than many modern erections of the same class. The style of the majority of them, however, was of a later age, and a new row was in course of building, so superior to the rest that they promised, when finished, to fulfil the boast of their designer, and be a comfort to look at and a pleasure to live in.

On the brow of the wooded hill which I have mentioned as cutting off Redscar from Whitebrook were two houses, about half a mile apart, embowered in trees, surrounded by gardens, and approached by winding, grass-bordered avenues. They were square, substantial structures of grey sandstone, and, though sufficiently well-looking, had evidently been planned rather with a view to comfort and solidity than to outward appearance.

One of them was called Redscar Hall; the other bore the name of Redscar House. In the former, some years prior to the opening of our story, had lived Randle Ryvington, uncle of the Randle whose acquaintance the reader has already made, and Dora's father. In Redscar House lived the younger Randle, better known in the neighbourhood as Red Randle and Red Ryvington, and his brother Robert, generally spoken of as Bob, to distinguish him from his father, whose name was also Robert. This Robert had died the year before Randle's visit to Switzerland, shortly after taking his elder son into partnership, and some ten years after the elder Randle had dissolved his connection with the firm of Ryvington and Sons, and left Redscar Hall for Deepdene Park, a place on the other side of Whitebrook. As Randle senior had also a son Randle, the male members of the Ryvington family consisted at that time of three Randles and two Roberts, a state of things which naturally led to one of the families being distinguished as the Redscar and the Deepdene Ryvingtons. By a natural transition these designations were shortened respectively

to 'Red' and 'Deep;' and the cousins Randle, who were almost exactly of the same age, and so like each other as often to be mistaken for twins, became *par excellence* 'Deep Ryvington' and 'Red Ryvington,' while their fathers were invariably spoken of as 'Mr. Ryvington' and 'Mr. Robert.' In this respect they were exceptionally fortunate, nearly every other manufacturer in the neighbourhood being dubbed with some post-baptismal name, often more expressive than flattering.

Robert Ryvington had devoted himself nearly all his life long to the concern, to which he considered it to be one of the greatest of earthly privileges to belong. He loved it as a sailor loves his ship, an officer his regiment, a squire of old family his hereditary estate. He looked upon it as something apart from himself, as having an almost sacred character. He placed its interest above his own personal interest, or that of any other person. 'The concern must not suffer,' was his final and invariable answer to every proposal which seemed adverse to its welfare. It was a joke among his neighbours that when Mr. Robert died he would take the

latest balance-sheet with him to show to his father in the other world.

When his brother Randle first proposed to retire from the concern, Robert could hardly believe his own ears. It was the first time in the history of the concern that any Ryvington had wished to sever his connection therewith; and the state of mind which could make such a consummation seem desirable was simply incomprehensible to him. Although his brother's retirement would leave him sole proprietor of the concern, he tried hard to turn him from his purpose; but Randle had made up his mind, and their partnership was dissolved—in some measure also their friendship, for they were never the same to each other again, and Robert marked his sense of his brother's lack of loyalty to the concern by erasing his name as executor from his will. Shortly before his death, however, he repented him of this resolve, and re-nominated Randle as one of his trustees.

Two years after Randle's retirement, Robert's elder son, then about eighteen, finished his education, and began to learn his duties as a future member of the concern. As the lad was

sharp, and had a bent for science, his father, after he left the Whitebrook Grammar School, sent him for two years to Glasgow, where he studied mechanics and chemistry under two celebrated professors of those branches of knowledge.

The day his son was of age Robert made him a partner, an arrangement that gave the old gentleman unspeakable satisfaction; for the thought that in the event of his death the concern would be left to manage itself, and might, in such a dire contingency, even cease to exist, had longed caused him mortal anxiety. From this fear he was now relieved, and, as Randle had already proved himself an able coadjutor and an excellent man of business, his father felt that, with a little more experience, the lad might be trusted to bear the burden alone should the need arise. The need did arise. A few years later Robert slept his last sleep in the family vault in the parish churchyard. When he knew his end was approaching he called his son to him.

‘You are young to be left with such a weight on your shoulders, my dear lad,’ he said. ‘I

would I might have been spared a few years longer; but God's will be done! Be cautious; don't stretch your arm further than the coat sleeve will reach. You are sharp enough—I have no fear about that, but young folks are sometimes apt to be a bit too venturesome. Be a father as well as a brother to Bob; he's not like you, he'll want looking after. I need not tell you to be good to your mother, you always have been; you have been good to us both. Nobody could wish for a better son. God in Heaven bless you, my lad! Do your duty; stick to the concern.'

'I will try, father,' said Randle, struggling with his tears. 'And, God helping me, I will do my duty by the concern, as you have done yours.'

He gave the promise freely, though he would rather his father's thoughts at this surpreme moment had not been so entirely taken up with worldly affairs.

'I know you will; good lad, good lad. Now I shall die easy. I know the concern in your hands will be safe. It makes me feel better; may be I shall pull through after all.'

The day after this conversation Robert Ryvington died. His last words were, ‘Duty—concern—Randle.’

He appointed as his executors Sophia, his wife, Randle, his brother, Randle, his son, and Leonard Pleasington, of Whitebrook, his trusty friend and legal adviser. His second son, then about twenty, was to have the option, two years later—of which there could be little question that he would avail himself—of entering the concern as partner, if Randle should at that time be of opinion that his brother could fill the position with credit to himself and advantage to the business.

Among other provisions of the will was one to the effect that on each of the testator’s sons and his wife should be settled a sum of ten thousand pounds, so that, as Robert, when he was explaining his intentions in this regard to his lawyer, observed, there would always be bread and cheese for them, whatever happened. As, however, Randle did not think that so large a sum could at once be spared from the working capital of the concern—seeing that they had lately built a new loom shed and spent a good

lot of money on machinery and other improvements—it was agreed that the amount in question should form a first charge on the Redscar estate. When this expedient was first proposed, Randle objected that it was against a long-standing rule of the concern to borrow money, either on mortgage or in any other way. To this objection Mr. Pleasington replied that the transaction would involve neither borrowing nor payment, and that the property would be just as much the property of the family as previously; whereupon Randle yielded the point and the arrangement as proposed was carried out.

The year following his father's death, Randle, who besides bearing almost alone the burden of a large business—for Bob had not long left school, and was not yet of much use to him—had been compelled to undertake many extraneous matters arising out of the winding-up of his father's affairs, and was beginning to suffer somewhat in health, made a trip to Switzerland, in the course of which, as the reader is aware, he formed the acquaintance of Lord Lindsarnc and his family, and of Sergius Kalouga.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN MOSLEY STREET.

THREE days after quitting Switzerland, Dora, and Lady Muriel, Randle was in the midst of murky Manchester. The change was startling. It could hardly have been more so if he had gone to bed in fairy-land and awoke in pandemonium. Instead of snow-white peaks, vaulted over with cerulean skies, were black-throated chimneys overhung with smoky clouds. The arrowy Rhone was replaced by the inky Irwell, the pathless pine-woods by crowded streets, the blue expanse of Lake Lemman by a babel of sooty buildings. Randle, as he walked down Mosley Street towards Ryvington and Son's warehouse, breathed a sigh of regret: for, man of business and devoted to duty though he was, he had a strain of

romance in his character, and glancing at the sights around him, and mentally comparing them with the scenes he had so lately quitted, he thought, if the alternative had been open to him, he would willingly have exchanged Lancashire and his present lot for some

‘Fair clime where every season smiles
Benignant o’er those blessed isles,’

and, perchance, a companion equally fair and benignant. But the atmosphere and associations of Mosley Street are not altogether propitious for ‘winged wanderings of the fancy;’ and when Randle reached the door of his warehouse he was roused to the reality of things by the sight of a load of shirtings fresh from Redscar; while the grasp of old Oates’s hand, and the sound of his cheery voice, completed the shattering of his day-dream, and banished from his mind—for the moment at least—the last vagrant yearnings for a mountain land and an angelic face.

‘Glad to see you back, Mr. Randle; glad to see you back. Your trip seems to have done you a power of good. Why, you are as brown as a bit of old mahogany. I hope

you liked Switzerland, sir. A fine country, they tell me. Don't you feel as if you were a tickét-of-leave man going back to penal servitude? I always do when I come back to Manchester after my holiday at the sea-side.'

Oates was the salesman, a dapper little fellow with big eyes, so very wide open as to suggest that the owner's mental condition was one of chronic astonishment. Though everybody called him Old Oates, and he had been a long time in the service of the concern—for which he had an immense respect—he was not a very old man, and, despite his sixty years, 'sound in wind, limb, and eyesight,' as he often took occasion to observe.

'Well, it is rather a trial, buckling to after a pleasant holiday, which you would gladly have made longer if you could. But life is not all beer and skittles, you know. We must not put pleasure before business. And how have you been this long time, Oates?'

'Salubrious, Mr. Randle; salubrious. Never better in my life, as I know of—sound in wind, limb, and eyesight; and there isn't many men of my age can say that. And what is more, I'll

back myself to run up a flight of steps with anybody in Manchester ten years younger; or anybody else, weight for age. Ah, ah, ah!

The capability of physical exertion denoted by Mr Oates's last observation was one of considerable importance to a person in his position, for a Manchester salesman passes about half his working life in getting up stairs, and a failure of leg power, or a tendency to broken-windedness, would be almost as fatal to his usefulness as to that of a racehorse in training or a foot soldier in war time.

‘I am glad you keep so well and hearty, Oates. Why, you are as fresh as when you first came to us, and that is—let me see—how long since?’

‘Eight and twenty years come next September. I entered the service of the concern the year your father was married—that was before you were born, and I hope I shall live to see you married also, Mr. Randle.’

‘Thank you for the information,’ said Randle, with a laugh; ‘and now about business. How have things gone on while I have been away?’

‘Very well, Mr. Randle. Nothing special has

happened, at least not at this end, and I have not heard of anything at the works. Deliveries are all in order; everything up to time.'

'Sold anything?'

'Very little—for the time, I mean—perhaps 20,000 pieces of one sort and another. I took an order yesterday from Madder and Mordaunt for 3,000 railways at seven and six.'

By 'railways' Mr. Oates meant a description of cloth on which that name had been conferred to signify the extreme rapidity with which, owing to their lightness of texture, they were woven.

'But is not that rather a low price?' asked Randle. 'The last price we got, if I remember rightly, was seven and nine.'

'So it is, but the market has been as flat as ditch water—all the time you have been away, I think. But we are not badly off. We have orders on the books that will keep us going for a fortnight or more; and there was decidedly a better feeling on 'Change yesterday afternoon. There is more doing at Calcutta, I'm told, and Wild and Savage sent over an hour ago to ask for quotations; [and that's a good sign. They

know the time o' day, Wild and Savage do. But they won't catch old Oates napping, let 'em get up as early as they like.'

'You did not quote, I suppose?'

'Not exactly. I said I'd slip across in the course of the morning. I don't mean to name a price to anybody until I know what the feeling is here, and what is being done in Liverpool. When Wild and Savage want a quotation early in a morning, I says to myself, "Keep your weather eye open, Oates," says I. It is not easy to catch an old bird with chaff, Mr. Randle.'

'Not an old bird like you, Oates, I'm sure. I shall leave everything to you to-day, for I'm so completely out of the swim that if I were to meddle I should muddle. Will my brother be here to-day, do you suppose?'

'I believe so. He was here on Friday, and said he should very likely run up to-day to see what was going on. A smart young man Mr. Robert, sir. With a little more experience he'll make a capital man of business. He knows what he's about, he does.'

'Yes, Bob is no fool. I think sometimes he

is even too sharp—too sharp and sanguine. His ideas are very large.’

‘Why, yes, they are, just a little. It is a fault of young people, being very hopeful, and believing they know better than anybody else. And it’s maybe as well as it is so, or else what would become of ’em when they get older, poor things, and found what a terribly disappointing world it is? Depend upon it, Mr. Randle, a hopeful disposition is a wonderful help to a man in the battle of life. As for Mr. Robert, you have only to keep a tight hand on him, and he’ll do first-rate. But here is Blezzard coming down the steps. He was here on Friday, inquiring when you’d be back, very anxious; and as he would not say what his business was, neither to me nor Mr. Robert, I expect it is something private. I think I’ll just see how many pieces have come up this morning. Wild and Savage are very pressing for the completion of their order for madapollams.’

Ryvington and Sons’ warehouse was a large cellar, divided into a room for the reception of pieces, and two small offices. Their standing and the extent of their business would have

fully warranted the firm having a more imposing place; but they had been tenants of this particular cellar upwards of thirty years; and, as a rule, the concern was very conservative, especially as touching outlay or changes, the influence of which on future stocktakings was problematical or remote.

‘If you will undertake to get a halfpenny a piece more on our production the year round,’ said Mr. Robert Ryvington one day to Oates, when the latter was urging him to take a large first-floor warehouse in Portland Street, ‘we will flit to-morrow.’

The salesman, notwithstanding the soundness of his wind, limbs, and eyesight, and his unequalled capacity for getting up stairs, being unable to accept this condition, the lease of the cellar was renewed for a further term of fourteen years.

‘Well, Blezzard,’ said Randle, as the individual whom Oates had seen descending the steps entered the office, ‘you wanted to see me, I hear; what can I do for you to-day?’

‘It is gradely warm to-day,’ rejoined Blezzard,

taking a big blue pocket-handkerchief from the crown of his hat and mopping his face therewith—a pleasant, clean-cut face, with plenty of colour, which, however, it did not owe to drink, the man being a teetotaller. ‘Wor it as warm wheer yo’ve bin, Mr. Frank?’

‘Warmer, a good deal.’

‘Bith, mon, yo’ wornt frozen, then? Do yo’ want a hoss, thinken yo’, Mr. Frank—a gradely good un, rising seven, saand as a bell, and ’ansom as paint; just suit yo’ or Mr. Robbut, to ride a-hunting.’

‘I have not time to go a-hunting, Blezzard, and Robert has a hunter; if he had another, he would be hunting too much, I am afraid.’

‘Well, could yo’ do wi’ a cart hoss, then? That grey mare as goes in th’ shafts—Patty, durn’d they call her?—is getting too stiff for yo’re wark. I’ve gotten one as would jest do for yo’, same colour, too, but a hoss—you never seed such legs and such a barril i’ your life. Stan’s sixteen hon’s and a hoaf; as strong as a helephant and draws like a devil. What sayen yo’, Mr. Frank?’

‘I don’t know, Blezzard. I think the grey

mare will do yet awhile. When I make up my mind to part with her, I'll let you know.'

'Are yo' wantin' ought i'th shuttle or bobbin way, thinken yo'? We are gradely weel fit up now for tornin' 'em out fast, and I can put 'em in chep.'

'You know we always give orders for these things at the works, Blezzard. I'll inquire how we stand when we get back, and you can call on Friday. Is that all?' added Randle, with a shade of impatience in his voice; for he was growing rather weary of the man's importunity.

'Nay, not quite. I wanted to speak to yo' about summut else,' said Blezzard, as he again vigorously applied the pocket-handkerchief to his face, which, without apparent cause—for the cellar was cool enough—was now perspiring more profusely than ever.

'Well, what is it, Blezzard?'

'About that theer account as is due next Friday. I wanted to ax yo' to let it stan' o'er till next month end.'

'What is it for, and how much?'

'Them twothry skips o' yarn; they comin' to

welly' (nearly) 'a hundred pounds—£98 15s. 6d. after the discount's taken off.'

'Well, you know our rule, Blezzard. When people don't keep faith with us—that is, when they don't pay according to agreement—we have nothing more to do with 'em.'

'That is hard law, Mr. Frank.'

'Law always is hard to those who break it. You must pay the account when it is due, Blezzard, or take the consequences. I should make the same answer to the best house in Manchester, even if I knew they had a million at their bankers.'

Blezzard wiped his forehead more furiously than ever. He was an old Redscar overlooker, and had known Randle from a lad. Some years previously he had given up his situation, and started for himself as a sort of jack-of-all-trades. He was partner in a small weaving concern, ran a bobbin mill and a sawmill, made glue, pickers, and soap, dealt in horses, and traded in timber. A spirit of enterprise, however laudable in itself, is apt to land a man in pecuniary difficulties. This was Blezzard's position on the present occasion. He was desperately hard up. The

request he had made of Randle he would never have dreamt of preferring to Randle's father ; but he had counted—as it seemed without warrant—on the son being more complaisant. If he could have persuaded him to buy the hunter or the cart horse, the amount to be paid on the following Friday would have been materially reduced, so that Randle's refusal to trade was a great disappointment.

‘Well,’ he said, after a long pause and another application of the handkerchief, ‘I mun see if I cannot scrape it together. This is Tuesday ; I’m three days afore me ; I can happen manage it. I suppose if I bring yo’ th’ brass i’ good time o’ Saturday morning that’ll do ?’

‘No, Blezzard, it must be Friday—as late as ever you like, but Friday.’

‘Well, yo’ are hard, Mr. Randle, and me as tackled’ (overlooked) ‘five and twenty year for yo’re father and yo’re gronfather, and wor a weyver at Redscar factory afore yo’ were born ! Good day to yo’, Mr. Randle.’

‘Wait a moment,’ said Randle, as Blezzard turned to go, ‘I am, perhaps, not as hard as you think. How is your business, or, I should

rather say, how are your businesses going on—are you all right ?’

‘Yo’ mean con I pay twenty shillings t’ pound, I reckon ?’

Randle nodded.

‘Ay, con I, and have as much left as will keep our Mary and me i’ porridge as long as we live. And what is moor, I shall have plenty of brass comin’ round in a month’s time—enough to pay everybody.’

‘Well, I’ll tell you what I’ll do for you. The concern must be paid. I can have no parley about that. But I’ll lend you £200—give you a cheque on my own private account, I mean. Half that will, of course, go to pay your debt to the concern ; the other half you can use until your money comes round—say until the end of next month.’

‘That’s gradely good on yo’, Mr. Randle,’ said Blezzard, shoving the blue pocket handkerchief into the crown of his hat, for a sunny smile was drying up the perspiration that bedewed his face. ‘If ever I can do yo’ a good turn for this kindness, I will.’

The cheque was written out and Jack Blez-

zard left the warehouse with a light heart. He took the steps two at a time, and went at such a rate that he nearly overturned a young man who was leisurely descending them, whom in his hurry he had not perceived.

‘Hulloa ! By Jingo, you nearly knocked me down,’ exclaimed the young man. ‘Why, it’s Jack Blezzard. You have got your seven-leagued boots on this morning, I think, Jack. But I would not advise to go at such a bat up Mosley Street. If you do the police will be taking you up for overdriving, or on suspicion of being an escaped lunatic.’

‘I ax you pardon, Mr. Robbut. I did not see you.’

‘It’s a good job I saw you. If I had not you would have knocked me into the middle of next week. Has my brother turned up this morning, do you know ?’

‘Ay, yo’ll find him theer i’ th’ office.’

‘All right. Good morning, Jack ; and, I say, the next time you feel inclined to try how fast you can get upstairs, just see that the way is clear before you start.’

‘Well, I will, Mr. Robbut ; I promise yo’ that.

It wouldn't do to knock yo' into th' middle o' next week ; yo'd happen be stopping theer. I went so fast because I wor so fain ; if yo'll ax yo're brother he'll happen tell you why. Good day.'

Whereupon Blezzard turned into Mosley Street, while Robert Ryvington completed his descent of the steps, and, after exchanging greetings with Oates, entered the little glass-partitioned inner office, where his brother was looking over a list of the orders that had been taken in his absence.

'Hulloa, Bob, is that you ?' said Randle, looking up. 'How are you, old fellow ?'

'Tip-top. And you—but I need not ask—your face is the colour of a piece of ancient oak: Enjoyed yourself ?'

'Very much. I have had a most delightful trip. You must have a run on the Continent one of these days, Bob.'

'I shall be delighted, I am sure. You could not name a day for the start, could you, Ran ? I am ready.'

'Not at this moment, I am afraid. We will see later. How is the mother ?'

‘Very well in body, but rather uneasy in mind.’

‘What about?’

‘Her son Randle. When she heard you were on the Alps, she was afraid you might be tumbling down a precipice, or getting yourself smothered by an avalanche. But her latest fear—I might say her present (for we were not sure on what day you would be back)—was that you might be lost in crossing the Channel.’

‘Poor mother! she is too anxious.’

‘Well, if there had not been you to fidget about there would probably have been some other source of anxiety for her,’ rejoined Bob, with a reflective air. ‘A certain amount of misery seems necessary to mother’s happiness.’

‘How have you gone on at the works? All right?’

‘Could not have gone on better, Ran, if you had been there yourself. For that matter you might have taken another month. You have not been missed in the least.’

‘That is because of your excellent management, I suppose,’ said Randle, who had made

such complete arrangements before his departure that it was hardly possible for things to have gone otherwise than smoothly during his absence.

‘Well, I think my management has had something to do with it. By-the-by, I bagged Robin o’ Kits the other day.’

‘What for? Robin is a a very good weaver, and has been with us a long time.’

‘He cheeked me, and I could not stand that, you know.’

‘I thought Robin had more sense. I have always found him very respectful. What did he say to you, Bob?’

‘He did not say it exactly to me,’ rejoined Bob, reddening. ‘but I heard him, and that is the same thing, you know.’

‘But what did he say?’

‘Well, there was a lot of them—a lot of the hands, I mean—going up New Factory Lane, and I was close behind them, but they did not see me, and they were talking’ (here Bob reddened a second time) ‘about my—about my moustache.’

‘Indeed,’ observed Randle, gravely, though

with the least suspicion of a smile lurking at the corners of his mouth. 'And what did they say?'

'One of them was saying that young Rob-but seemed to have a good conceit of that top lip of his. "Top lip be hanged," said Robin; "if our Betty couldn't grow a better moustache than young Bob's, I'd give her a good hiding." That made me rather mad, as you may suppose, Ran, so I just stepped up and asked him if he thought that was a right way to speak of his employer, and what do you think?—he had actually the impudence to maintain that they were not talking about me at all, and that the Bob he meant was bandy-legged Bob—the self-actor minder in number five, you know! That was more than I could stand, so I told him to go about his business, for a cheeky young rascal.'

'And you think he did mean you?'

'Think! I am sure. Why, bandy-legged Bob has no more moustache than a new-born baby.'

'Still I don't think Robin o' Kits meant to be disrespectful; he did not know you were

within earshot, and you remember the proverb, "Listeners never hear any good of themselves!" When he found you had heard him, he tried to get out of the scrape the best way he could. If he asks to come back, as I daresay he will, I think you had better give him a talking to, and take him on again.'

'Well, if you think so, Ran, I will. But I'll give him a good blowing up first,' said Bob, with a fierce pull at his fluffy moustaches, of which, being all the hair he had on his face, or was likely to have, he was excusably proud, and submitted them to frequent caressings and strokings. For the rest, Bob Ryvington was a tall, well-proportioned lad, with an intelligent eager face, and keen grey eyes. His hair was light, his complexion blonde, and his nose *retroussé*. He wore his hat rather on one side, which gave him a rakish air that was foreign to his disposition, dandyism not being one of his foibles. The habit was involuntary, due, not to deliberate intention, but to physical peculiarity; for his skull, being slightly lobsided, he could not, do as he would, prevent his hat from tilting a little towards his left ear. This

difficulty and his extremely youthful appearance, owing to the almost nakedness of his face, were for the present Bob's greatest troubles.

'Have you had occasion to draw anything out of the bank?' asked Randle.

'I have not drawn a single cheque. There has been nothing to pay but wages and some small accounts since you went away, which have been more than covered by moneys received. The bank balance has improved by as many thousands the last two or three weeks.'

After some further conversation on divers topics, and a conference with Oates, on the all-important question of prices and sales, all three left the warehouse on various errands relating to the business of the concern.

CHAPTER XV.

RED RANDLE AT HOME.

THE compartment in which Randle and his brother travelled to Whitebrook was filled with manufacturers. It was market day, and there was probably not a person in the train that did not own allegiance to King Cotton. As was natural in the circumstances, a good deal of shop was talked.

‘Done any business to-day, Ryvington?’ asked a portly, pompous gentleman, with a red face, and a white waistcoat, who seemed gifted with great fluency of speech, for he talked as much as all the rest of his companions put together. He was the active partner in the firm of Oliver Tugwood and Co. His brother was one of the borough members. Their father, in days gone by, had kept the ‘Nag’s Head,’ in Leather

Lane, a circumstance which the people of Whitebrook strove to keep in remembrance by calling the Tugwood Mills 'Pinchnoggin.'

'A little,' answered Randle; 'about 15,000 pieces, I think, of one sort and another.'

'Shirtings?'

'Some of them—about half, I fancy.'

'What did you get for eight and a quarters, if it's a fair question?' asked Tugwood, who was noted for his thirst for information, especially about other folks' business.

Randle told him.

'Pon my word, Ryvington, you always seem to get better prices than anybody else. Why, I have not got as much by sixpence a piece.'

'That perhaps comes of the difference in quality,' suggested Randle.

'But you surely don't mean to say, Ryvington, that your shirtings are sixpence a piece better than ours? A trifle better they may be, but not that much.'

'Buyers don't seem to be of your opinion, Tugwood, and the proof of the pudding is in the eating, you know.'

‘What do you think about it, Twister?’ inquired Tugwood of the man next to him. ‘Do you think that Ryvington’s shirtings are better than ours?’

‘Ay, do I. Why, there’s sixpennuth moor cotton in ’em than yours, let alone better weaving. Yours is nobbut rags, mon, with th’ hoiles filled up wi’ china clay.’

Twister had risen from the ranks, and, having made money, he naturally thought himself as good as any other body. He always spoke his mind with uncompromising bluntness, and without the least respect for persons. A roar of laughter followed his answer, for Tugwood, besides being too inquisitive and patronising to be popular, had the name of putting more filling in his goods than any other manufacturer in the trade. Not having a rejoinder ready at the moment, he judiciously gave the conversation another turn by asking if anybody present had received his assessment under schedule D, which he pronounced ‘sheddle.’

‘I guess we all have,’ said Twister, his stiff, red beard bristling with indignation. ‘I know I have, and a bonny beggar it is.’

‘You don’t mean to say, Twister, that they have stuck you something on?’

‘By gum, but haven’t they! Only £2,000.’

‘They have increased our assessment too—very considerably,’ said Tugwood.

‘And mine,’ joined in several others.

‘I call it a right down hard case,’ observed Twister, ‘that we should be taxed for bigger incomes when we are making less brass.’

‘Are you going to appeal?’

‘What is the use? I should get nowt off. I did go to Smalley one time, and tried to convince him as he had assessed me a deal too high; and I showed him figures as proved what I said. “And so you have not made that much, Mr. Twister?” he said, quite pleasant like. “That I haven’t, Mr. Smalley,” says I, “and I hope you’ll take my case into consideration, and knock me a thousand or two off,” says I. “You assure me, then, Mr. Twister,” says he, “that you have really not made within £2,000 of the amount of profit for which you are assessed?” “I have not, Mr. Smalley,” says I, “dall my rags if I have.” “Then you ought to have, Mr. Twister,” said th’ owd beggar,

“and I am quite unable to comply with your request to make an abatement of your assessment. I consider it to be most reasonable, and, if what you say be true, you are managing your business very badly. If you like to appeal, you can, of course, do so ; but I am really afraid you would only have your trouble for your pains.”’

‘And did you appeal?’

‘I wasn’t such a fool. What would have been the use of losing both time and money? Another thing, I’ve given o’er making any return. I just pays what they put down. A time will happen come when they’ll put down too little, and if it does, dall my rags if I’ll tell ’em.’

‘How do you get on with these income tax chaps, Bradshaw? Do they treat you as badly as they seem to be treating everyone else?’ asked Tugwood of an individual who sat quietly smoking in a corner of the compartment, and who had hitherto taken no part in the conversation. He was a heavy pasty-faced man with a large nose, little eyes, and a very big head—like a book, some people said it was—for he possessed a marvellously retentive

memory, and could calculate things mentally and instantaneously that other people had to waste a good deal of time and blacklead over. These qualities, combined with good business capacity, had raised him from the position of warehouseman and outlooker to that of partner in one of the largest concerns in the county.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ he observed, in answer to Tugwood’s appeal, ‘you may say what you like about the income tax being this, that, or the other. All I can say is as I’m d—d glad I have it to pay. I never thought I should have had at one time. Them as doesn’t like income tax can easy mend themselves—they’ve only to look cuts’ (cotton pieces) ‘and cut their income down to a pound a week.’

This phase of the conversation, like that about the price of Ryvington’s shirtings, ended in a laugh rather at Tugwood’s expense, and in no very long time thereafter the train arrived at Whitebrook.

A great gathering of horses and vehicles was ranged in front of the station—a handsome and roomy edifice—waiting for the home-coming

manufacturers. Among them was the Ryvington four-wheeled drag, and the brothers mounting thereon, Bob took the reins and drove rapidly in the direction of Redscar. After passing up a narrow street, bounded on one side by coal wharves and foundries, on the other by breweries and factories, and rising a steep hill, they entered a broad, macadamised road, whose whiteness contrasted pleasantly with the coal and soot-darkened pavement they had left behind them—the more especially as the surrounding country was agreeably undulating and, for that part of the county, well-wooded.

A short spin on this road brought them to the lane leading to Redscar, which ran at right angles with the main road.

‘Shall we go round by the counting-house, Randle,’ asked Bob, ‘or drive straight home?’

‘I think we will go home. It is almost too late to do any good at the counting-house, and I daresay mother will be anxious to know if I am back.’

‘All right; here we are, then. Kenyon, jump down and open the gate. Old Jane is as deaf as a post. If she does not happen to be

on the watch, you have to shout at least fifty times before you can get her out of the lodge.'

Redscar House, though as to externals solid and unpretentious, was a spacious, and by no means an unhandsome dwelling; and being set in a fair show of greensward and garden, and approached by an avenue of old lime-trees, populated by a colony of rooks, its general appearance was rather that of a country gentleman's seat than a manufacturer's mansion.

The drag had hardly pulled up before the substantial portico which adorned the front of the house, when the door opened and a tall lady in black silk dress and a widow's cap appeared at the threshold. Despite her sixty years, her tall form was unbent and her dark hair only slightly streaked with grey. Her features were rather large, and their expression in repose was somewhat hard and stern; but, when she caught sight of Randle, they lit up with a glow of pleasure which changed their look as if by magic into one of deepest tenderness and love.

Randle jumped from the drag, took both his mother's hands in his, and kissed her.

‘I am thankful you are safe back, child,’ she said. ‘I was beginning to be anxious about you.’

‘So Bob has been telling me. But, dear me, mother, what was there to be anxious about? There is no more danger in a trip to Switzerland now-a-days than in a journey to London.’

‘We can never tell what may happen,’ rejoined Mrs. Ryvington, who always looked at the dark side of things. ‘Even a journey to London has its dangers. Are there not railway accidents? And I am always uneasy about my children when they are away from me.’

‘It is very well you have no more of them, then; or whatever would become of you? How would you do if you had two or three children in every quarter of the globe, like Mrs. Maitland?’

‘I suppose I should have to bear it. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, you know. But won’t you come into the dining-room and have some tea? I am sure you are hungry.’

‘Well, I do feel rather peckish. Yes, thank you, mother, I will have some tea.’

‘Would you like something to it?’

‘I don’t know whether Ran would or not,’ put in Bob, who had at this moment joined them, ‘but I know I should. Besides, what a queer tea it would be without anything to it!’

‘Randle knows what I mean. Would you like some meat?’

‘By all means, mother, let us have—but I know you have something ready, and I am sure it is good.’

‘So am I, because I know,’ interrupted Bob. ‘I heard a whisper this morning. It’s boned turkey and cold boiled ham. When will tea be ready, mother?’

‘In ten minutes.’

‘All right. In ten minutes I’ll be ready too, and I bet Ran will also.’

The Redscar Ryvingtons kept up the old custom of early dinners and evening teas, which latter on special occasions, such as Randle’s return, were particularly strong teas, differing little from the more substantial meal save in the addition of the beverage that cheers but not inebriates.

‘Have you seen much of uncle while I have

been away?' asked Randle, as his mother was pouring out his second cup of tea.

'Not very much. He has only called twice, I think; but he has been pretty often to the counting-house. Has not he, Robert?' (Mrs. Ryvington never called her second son Bob.)

'Rather—every day nearly. I never saw such a tiresome old beggar in my life.'

'Robert!' exclaimed his mother, in a tone of remonstrance, 'is that the way you speak of your uncle?'

'I don't care, mother, he is tiresome. He never lets a fellow alone. He was always wanting to know everything, and patronised me, and gave me fatherly advice, until at last I ran out of the counting-house whenever I saw his carriage coming over the hill; and old Pitt had standing orders never to be able to find me so long as Mr. Ryvington was on the ground. I suppose, as Randle was away, he thought he would have his fling.'

'Uncle Randle has a passion for meddling, there is no doubt,' said Red Randle, and, if I had not been partner as well as executor, I don't know what I should have done. But

since the time I reminded him that I was both, and that, though I would listen to his advice, I was the sole manager of the concern and meant to remain so, he has let me alone.'

'Only wait until I am partner, and I'll give him a bit of my mind too.'

'He will have nothing more to do with the concern after you are a partner, Bob; he will simply be one of the trustees for the settlements.'

'So much the better, for I don't like Uncle Randle a bit.'

'Robert! what are you saying?' exclaimed his mother.

'It's true, mother; and one ought always to speak the truth, you know. And, if you were to speak your mind, I don't think you like him much either—any more than Ran does. What do you think he was saying the other day in Whitebrook?'

'I have not the least idea, Robert. What was it?'

'Why, that he kept "those lads" on their legs—meaning Randle and me.'

'I think I have heard of him saying some-

thing of that sort before,' said Randle. 'He probably thinks it his duty; he is always great on duty, you know. At any rate it is of no consequence. If it pleases him to say so, it does us no harm.'

'You are too patient, Ran. I call such statements downright annoying — as if we could not get along without him.'

'Never mind,' observed Randle, helping himself to a slice of boned turkey, 'let him think and talk what he likes. But I will have no meddling, and that he knows. Hulloo! what is that?'

'Wheels,' said Bob.

'I declare, it is Uncle Randle,' exclaimed Red Randle, as a carriage drove past the dining-room window.

'Talk of the devil,' muttered Bob, as the door opened, and a smart waiting maid announced Mr. Ryvington and Mr. Randle Ryvington.

CHAPTER XVI.

DEEPDENE RANDLE.

MR. RYVINGTON was a tall, rather stout, grey-haired gentleman, with a short neck, a ruddy countenance, and a somewhat high-coloured nose, a peculiarity, as also an occasional attack of gout, which was probably attributable to the fact that he thought it his duty to drink the greater part of a bottle of port wine every day with his dinner. He tried to put on a stately manner, but only succeeded in being pompous, and, as is often the case with pompous people, his words were apt to be bigger than his deeds.

His son Randle was strikingly like his nephew Randle. Apart, they were often mistaken for each other; albeit when they were

together it was impossible to doubt which was which. Deepdene Randle, though in height, feature, and complexion so much resembling his cousin that they might have been twin brothers, was slightly stouter than Redscar Randle; his eyes were a shade smaller, his face, too, was fuller, and his general aspect, some people thought, less frank and winning.

‘Glad to see you back, Randle, lad,’ said Mr. Ryvington, as he shook hands with his nephew, after having greeted his sister-in-law. ‘I hope you have enjoyed yourself in Switzerland. I travelled there myself when I was a young fellow—did it all. Times were different then, though. How long were you in going from Lausanne to London?’

‘Twenty-six or seven hours, I think.’

‘Just look at that, now. I was twelve days on the road, and did not let the grass grow under my feet either. But that is forty years since—things are very different now.’

Here Mrs. Ryvington interposed to ask if he would not take a cup of tea.

‘Ah, thank you, Sophia, just a cup, but nothing to eat. We dine late, you know, and

I don't want to spoil my dinner. We just called *en passant*—on our way back from Orrington, you know—been to look at some property there, which I think I shall purchase, if they will take my price. I will give £9,500, and as I told Chipping—that is the agent, you know—the money is ready when he is ready, cash down, and no questions asked. Ah, ah—that is the way to do business. If I had not been well trained in business we should not have occupied the position we do now—eh, Randle, my lad?' (This was spoken to his son.) 'My father, whom you two boys resemble so much, knew how to bring up a child in the way he should go, I can tell you. But it answers—that sort of bringing up answers. You will not find many men, taking it all together, who have succeeded better than me—than my brother Robert and myself. He has left you very well off, though I have perhaps been more fortunate than he has, and, please God, I'll put the family in its proper position before I have done. Is "Ancient Families of the Northern Counties" out yet, Randle?'

'Not yet,' answered his son. 'I don't think

it will be out for two or three months. But Peter Wiswell expects a proof every day—we have to revise it together.’

‘Ah, yes ; I was forgetting. Did I tell you, Randle’ (to his nephew) ‘Did I tell you that we have traced the family pedigree back to Adam de Ryvington of Angelzark, who obtained a grant of Ryvington Pike from Edward III. for his valour at the battle of Agincourt?’

‘Yes, you told me,’ said Randle, rather indifferently, for he had heard the story—of which he did not believe a word—at least half a dozen times before.

‘It has cost me a deal of money having these researches made, as you may suppose. But that is not all. Peter Wiswell found a document the other day that carries the pedigree back a stage further, and it appears that the father or grandfather of this Adam was a soldier of fortune, served in the Imperial Guard at Constantinople, and afterwards in Germany, where he married Hildegarde, daughter and co-heiress of Prince Hermann Barbarossa, one of the first and oldest families as is, Peter says. If he is right we have royal blood in our veins,

Randle, lad. And we have got a portrait of the reigning prince, and everybody that has seen it thinks that him and me are very like.'

'He has got a big red nose, then,' whispered Bob to his brother.

'It is all going to appear in the "Ancient Families of the Northern Counties." You shall have a copy as soon as it comes out. I have ordered fifty.'

'Fifty!'

'Yes, fifty at two guineas, that's the——'

'Never mind about the pedigree just now, father,' interrupted his son, just in time to prevent his parent letting the cat out of the bag. 'We are forgetting all about Dora. I suppose you saw Dora, Ran?'

Whereupon Randle told how he had found the young lady, and delivered the various messages with which she had charged him. After this he was asked to give some account of his wanderings—where he had been and what he had done. His first idea was to say nothing of his adventure in the Furca Pass, but remembering that he had told the story to Dora, and she might mention it in her letters home, he con-

cluded—lest his silence should be misconstrued—to tell it a second time.

‘Oh, Randle, you might have been killed,’ exclaimed his mother, when he had finished; and her emotion was so great that she felt constrained to retire a few minutes from the room, as her son rightly supposed, to offer up a thanksgiving for his escape.

‘And you saved the life of Lord Lindisfarne’s daughter, of Lady Muriel Avalon!’ observed Mr. Ryvington, in an awe-struck tone. ‘How very providential!’

‘And the earl asked you to Avalon Priory,’ said Deep Randle, with a look of envy. ‘You are in luck, cousin!’

‘I did not say he invited me. I said he promised to send me an invitation when the family returned to England.’

‘It is the same thing.’

‘Not quite; he may forget, you know.’

‘Why, it is one of the oldest earldoms in the kingdom, isn’t it, Randle?’ asked Mr. Ryvington.

‘Earl of Lindisfarne in the peerage of Scotland, and Baron Avalon of Avalon in the peerage of the United Kingdom,’ answered Deep

Randle, who was very knowing in such matters. 'But the present earl is not very rich, I believe. He came into the title rather late in life—succeeded his uncle the late earl—and as he has two or three dowagers on his hands, besides other encumbrances, his income is not exactly princely. At least so I have heard,'

'But think of his high rank—Earl of Lindisfarne in the peerage of Scotland, and Baron Avalon of Avalon in the peerage of the United Kingdom—his ancient lineage and honourable name!' urged Mr. Ryvington. 'What is mere income compared with such priceless advantages?'

'They would be of very little use without income, I fancy,' said Red Randle. 'But do you think the earl is as well off in the matter of lineage as we are, uncle? At any rate he is not descended from the Prince Hermann what-do-you-call-him—Barbarossa—and I don't think he has royal blood in his veins.'

'But that is different, you know. Not that I don't think our pedigree is as good as his, but Lord Lindisfarne is—however, there is no use talking to you about these things. You are a

Radical, and would like, I daresay, to level all our ancient institutions to the ground.'

'Do you consider the Ryvington pedigree, as prepared by Peter Wiswell, to be an ancient institution, uncle?' rejoined Randle, with a significant smile.

'What does it matter to you whether I do or not?' returned Mr. Ryvington, angrily. 'At any rate you are not worthy of such a pedigree. I am sorry, very sorry, Randle, to see you are such a Radical. If my poor brother could have foreseen that his son would have deserted the old flag, how it would have grieved him!'

'I have not deserted the old flag, uncle. I have been a Liberal ever since I began to think seriously, that is since I went to Glasgow; and I believe that in keeping my opinion in abeyance during my father's lifetime I did what was right. But I never pretended to be what I was not.'

'Well, well, it is a subject about which we shall never agree, so let it drop. We are unenlightened individuals, and you are wiser than me, your father, and your grandfather all put together.'

‘I thought you said let it drop, uncle?’

‘Well, I have done, hav’n’t I? But’ (looking at his watch), ‘bless me, how late it is; we must be going, Randle’ (to his son). ‘I think you will find all right at the factory, Randle’ (to his nephew). ‘I have called nearly every day during your absence—I thought it my duty, you know—as Robert will tell you, though I am sorry to say he was not always there. I had a good deal of fault to find at times—I thought it my duty, you know—but the men knew I was not to be trifled with, and, as I said, you will find things all right.’

‘Thank you, uncle,’ said Randle, gravely. ‘I am sure you have been very good.’

‘Confound his impudence,’ said Bob, *sotto voce*. ‘Why, he never came that he did not set everybody by the ears, and it was all I could do to persuade the fellows to be civil to him.’

‘I try to be, lad; I try to be; and if you would only follow my advice about everything you would do well. But we cannot put old heads on young shoulders. You know the saying: Young folks think old folks are fools; old folks know that young folks are. Come, Randle,

lad, let us be off. We shall be half an hour late for dinner as it is.'

'I think my uncle is getting slightly crazed about the antiquity of the Ryvington family,' said the other Randle, as he returned to the dining-room after seeing that gentleman and his son into their carriage. 'It was always a weak point with him, but he talked greater nonsense to-night than I ever heard him talk before. If he swallows that story about our descent from Prince Hermann Barbarossa he'll swallow anything.'

'But do you think he does believe it, Randle?' asked his mother.

'I fancy he does. When a vain man wants very much to believe something that exalts him in his own estimation, and, as he thinks, in that of his neighbours, he generally succeeds.'

'Peter Wiswell makes a nice penny out of him.'

'Rather. And Peter will go on making bogus pedigrees as long as he is paid for them. That was really a fine stroke of his to connect us with the Barbarossa family. Why, Prince Bar-

barossa is half-cousin to the Queen, brother-in-law to the Emperor of Austria, and akin to half the royal houses in Europe.'

'It will all appear as large as life in the "Ancient Families of the Northern Counties," I suppose? That's another of Peter's speculations. Oh, he's a very downy gentleman, is Mr. Wiswell. Did you hear what my uncle said—that he had agreed to take fifty copies at two guineas each? And he would have said more if my cousin had not stopped him.'

'What would he have said?'

'That his taking fifty copies was the condition on which his bogus pedigree was to figure among those of the ancient families of the northern counties.'

'And then?'

'Why, he thinks it will be the means of attaining the great object of his ambition—getting the Ryvingtons of Deepdene recognised as a county family, and himself admitted to the intimacy of such people as the Claughtons, the Myerscoughs, and the Stalmines.'

'Do you think he will succeed?'

'No, they don't like him. They don't like

his bumptiousness. They have heard of his meannesses, and they laugh at his claims to ancient lineage. He would have had a far better chance of getting his ends if he had not pretended to be more than he is—a retired manufacturer of honourable family. It is Deepdene that has spoiled my uncle. My father used to say that, though my uncle was always a bit soft on the pedigree question, he was a very sensible man so long as he was in the concern. But he is not the first, by a long way, who has been demoralised by prosperity and the possession of land.'

'But he is very shrewd in some things, Randle,' observed his mother. 'See how well he manages his property. And I have heard your poor father say that the purchase of Deepdene was almost a stroke of genius.'

'Shrewd! I should think he is. In money matters there is nobody more so. Very few people have anything to do with Uncle Randle, except Peter Wiswell, that don't come off second best. As Jack Blezzard would say, they generally get hold of the dirty end of the stick.'

‘And some people say the deep ’un ’ (this was a designation Bob had conferred on his cousin) ‘is quite as keen.’

‘I don’t know about that. But it is likely enough, for he looks at everything from one point of view—that of his own interest. He did at school, and I don’t suppose he has altered much since.’

‘But does not everybody do the same?’ put in Bob.

‘Every unregenerate person does, Robert,’ observed his mother, with a little sigh, ‘and I am afraid your cousin Randle is one.’

‘And not the only one, by a long chalk,’ muttered Bob.

‘Very likely,’ continued Randle, not heeding these interruptions; ‘but there are degrees. What I mean is, that whenever anything happens that can touch himself or the family, the first thought that occurs to Randle is: How will this affect me? And he never tries to rise above this egoism, or to fight against the selfish impulses from which nobody is wholly free. And, unless his actions belie him, he is shaping his life on the principle of placing his own com-

fort and ambition before every other consideration—before even his duty to his father or the affection he owes his sister, to say nothing of outsiders.’

‘Are you not judging him rather hardly, my dear?’ rejoined Mrs. Ryvington. ‘I know he is very worldly, but to say he is utterly selfish seems rather uncharitable.’

‘I merely say what I believe to be true, mother. You know Randle and I have been schoolfellows, and I have very good grounds to go upon. Time will show whether I am right or not. If I am not, so much the better.’

CHAPTER XVII.

PEDIGREE PETER.

‘COUSIN RANDLE is in luck,’ said the other Randle to his father, as the two drove away from Redscar.

‘In having rendered so important a service to Lord Lindisfarne’s family, you mean?’

‘Not so much that as in having got introduced to the family, and received an invitation to Avalon Priory.’

‘Yes. I wish it had been your luck instead of his. If we were on visiting terms with the Lindisfarnes, Sir Humphrey Stalmine would think twice before refusing my invitations to dinner, as he did the last time I asked him. But do you think you would have had the presence of mind, Randle, to have plucked that girl—the Lady Muriel—from the carriage?’

‘Oh, yes, I think so. And very likely my cousin makes the most of it. I don’t suppose it was so much of a feat as he makes it appear.’

‘I don’t agree with you there, Randle. I have no great cause to love my nephew; he is not too respectful, and refuses to follow my advice; but, whatever may be his faults, he is at least sincere and truthful.’

‘A man may exaggerate, may he not, without absolutely lying? Well, I think Randle’s story of the rescue, and that, is too strange to be altogether true. Let us see whether he is really asked to Avalon Priory or not. That will be the test. If he is not, we shall know what conclusion to draw.’

‘If he is, he will perhaps introduce you and me, so for goodness’ sake don’t let him suppose you doubt his word. If we could ask the Stalmines and Myerscoughs to dinner to meet the Earl of Lindisfarne it would be the making of us. Until we can do something of the sort, or can get you a high-born wife, I am afraid we shall not be admitted into the county set. I should like you to marry well, Randle.’

‘And I mean to marry well if I can get a

chance. But how am I to go about it? These people never invite me to their houses. I should like to propose to Miss Claughton, but I never see her except in the hunting field.'

'But you will be very well off, Randle, and Miss Claughton is not rich. They say her father cannot leave her more than five thousand pounds, and will not give her a penny down.'

'That may be. But you will worsen my chance of marrying blood much, father, if you persist in dividing the property equally between Dora and myself.'

'There is no help for it, Randle. I promised your mother before she died that I would leave you equal. Besides, it is in the settlement. Your mother's fortune was twenty thousand pounds, which I thought a great deal thirty years since—it was as much almost as I had myself—and we agreed, and it was put down in the deed, that my property as well as hers should be equally divided among any children we might have. It is an engagement to which I have put my hand and seal, and there is no getting out of it. But I promise you one

thing, Randle, that my will shall be made in such a way that it will be entirely your own fault if you do not come into all my property, with the exception of a small legacy to Dora in addition to what she takes under her mother's settlement; and that she will, of course, have when she is twenty-one. I don't believe in large fortunes for girls.'

'But how on earth will you manage that, father?' said the young man, eagerly. 'I cannot conceive.'

'I daresay you cannot, and I do not mean to tell you. You will know soon enough; that is, when my last will and testament is read. Meantime you have no reason to complain. You have the interest of your mother's ten thousand pounds, and that, with your allowance from me, is equal to £1,000 a year, besides which you live free of charge at Deepdene, and I keep your horses. It is more than Sir Humphrey Stalmine allows his son. You are very well off, my lad, whatever you may think.'

'I was not complaining, father; only, if you want me to marry blood, I must be in a position to do so; and, if it were given out that I

am to inherit all your real estate, I should be a deal more of a catch, don't you see ?'

'All right, my lad. You find the blood, and I'll find the groats. Talking of marrying, do you think your cousin Randle cares at all for Dora ?'

'I do think so. Ran is very close in some respects, and hard to read ; but I think he is fond of Dora, and I am sure she likes him. At any rate, they have always cottoned to each other a good deal. Why do you ask the question—would you like them to make a match of it ?'

'Not particularly ; I was only asking for information. As for Dora marrying, it will be time enough to think about that two or three years hence. I don't believe in girls marrying so very early,' with the utterance of which sentiment Mr. Ryvington fell into a brown study, of which his son took advantage to light a cigar, and indulge in a smoke that lasted until they reached the gates of Deepdene Park.

Deepdene lay about two miles from Whitebrook, but the estate to which it gives a name was almost conterminous with the northern

boundary of the borough. Its purchase by the elder Ryvington was regarded, not only by his brother, but by the world of Whitebrook generally, as a stroke of genius. From almost time immemorial Deepdene had belonged to the Earls of Holleth, and been under settlements so strict that, although much of it was most desirable building land, nobody could be persuaded to build upon it. The longest lease the Holleth trustees were empowered to grant was sixty years, and Whitebrook manufacturers absolutely refused to build factories on a tenure so onerous. Mr. Ryvington had often cast his eye on the property and calculated its value to an enterprising man unfettered by absurd restrictions, and he resolved, if ever the opportunity should arise, to become its owner. The opportunity did arise. When Lord Forton, the Earl of Holleth's heir, attained his majority it was arranged to sell the Lancashire estates and invest the proceeds in land in Staffordshire. Mr. Ryvington, who was on friendly terms with the local steward, getting a word of this before anybody else in the neighbourhood, went up to London, saw the lawyers engaged in the matter,

and succeeded in buying the whole estate at the rate of twenty-five years' purchase of its agricultural value. It would have been cheap at double the money. Some rich Whitebrook people, who would gladly have bought Deepdene, when they knew how acutely Mr. Ryvington had out-generalled them, were much annoyed that he should have acquired the property for so inadequate a price; and it was broadly insinuated that he had bought the steward as well as the estate, if he had not bought the lawyers. To these insinuations—if they came to his ears—he paid no heed, but busied himself almost day and night in developing the resources and increasing the capabilities of his purchase. Being just outside the borough, and therefore escaping the heavy borough rates, yet close to the railway and well supplied with water, it quickly came into vogue as a site for factories and cottages, and grew so fast in value that when Robert Ryvington died his brother was a man of £10,000 a year, albeit the possibilities of the property were by no means exhausted.

One of Mr. Ryvington's first proceedings,

after paying off the mortgage which he had raised in order to enable him to complete his purchase, was to restore the old house in Deepdene Park, into which no Holleth had put his head for half a century. It was a fine old timbered mansion, standing on a grassy knoll, flanked by a small lake, and approached by a grand avenue of chestnut-trees. When its owner sent out invitations for his house-warming he felt that he was at length on the point of reaching the secret ambition of his life, and becoming, not only a country but a county gentleman, as he was already a county magistrate. Bitter, therefore, was his disappointment when none of the gentry of the neighbourhood accepted his invitation. They all replied very courteously and made very plausible excuses. One had the influenza, another had a wife in the straw, another had a sick son, others had previous engagements—all had something, and the end of it was that the county families were conspicuous by their absence, and their places had to be filled up at the last moment by an equal number of the despised people of Whitebrook. It next occurred to Mr. Ryvington that the one

thing needful was a pedigree, that if his family could be proved to be of a respectable antiquity—and he had an impression derived from his own consciousness that the proof would be easy—the position to which he aspired would readily be accorded to him.

In this emergency he bethought himself of Peter Wiswell, a local genealogist, journalist, antiquarian, author, and poetaster; for Peter was as great a hand at turning verses for puffing tradesmen as in making pedigrees for aspiring manufacturers. In early life Peter had come to grief as a bookseller and stationer, whereupon, to use his own expression, ‘he had betaken himself to a literary career.’ His greatest achievement in this line, the one of which he was most justly proud, was his ‘Whitebrook As It Is.’ He was commissioned to write the work for an enterprising publisher, who proposed to bring it out in combination with a directory. There was a little preliminary difficulty about the terms. Peter wanted a lump sum for the job; the publisher wanted to pay by results. In the end Peter agreed to accept so much a sheet, and the price was so low that the publisher

thought he had made a most excellent bargain. But the poor man had forgotten to make any stipulation about quantity, the amount of 'copy' to be supplied being left implicitly to the author's discretion, and he sent in, week after week, such piles of manuscript, that the unfortunate publisher was driven to the verge of despair. Peter wrote both a preface and an introduction. In the former he had much to say about the ancient Britons, the Romans, the Angles and Saxons, and the Danes, 'who harassed this part and made sad havoc in their incursions.' The introduction was a philosophical treatise in which Peter expressed his views on things in general in sentences of portentous length. 'The irregular progression of society,' he observed, 'in intellectual development, in moral force, in religious fervour, and in mercantile prosperity—its advances, retrogradations, aberrations, and intervals of quiescence are phenomena hard to understand and difficult to explain. There are, indeed, known to thoughtful observers and students of humanity, physical causes and ethical combinations on which philosophy is accustomed to base its estimates

of particular social epochs and political revolutions ; but there would seem to be something more recondite than their agency, which produces, at fixed intervals, an unwonted activity of mind and removes the time and ages in which it occurs from the common roll of history and its records ; and it is because of the faithful tracing from cause to effect of unbroken concatenation in the chain of great events and momentous cataclysms, and of the well-detailed and practical illustration which furnishes a complete clavis to their connection with, and affinity for, each other, that I experience such deep and unfeigned pleasure in bringing a work of this nature forward, as being a history of the ancient and renowned town of Whitebrook, a town whose present commercial development is on a par with its local importance in the days of the Plantagenet and Tudor monarchs of this realm of England.'

There was no event in the history of the borough that Mr. Wiswell thought too trivial to be chronicled. When he came to the year 1839 he observed: 'About this time we were chequered in our business,' a euphemism by

which the few who were still cognisant of the circumstance were reminded that 1839 was the year of Peter's bankruptcy. He devoted three chapters to the market house alone. He told of the time when, in the infancy of the town, old women 'who sold sweetstuff and potatoes were exposed without any protection, save such as their umbrellas afforded them, to all the inclemencies of the weather; and drew a pathetic picture of their sufferings. He next described in great detail a wooden shed—the first attempt at a covered market—which had been erected by a charitable townsman at his own expense to protect 'these poor but industrious and honest creatures from the fury of the elements.' And so he went on, until he came to the new market house, which he described from its very inception to the weather vane on its top, and wound up his narrative by observing, that 'over the principal entrance is a handsome lantern (by Messrs. Hodges and Podges, of this town), placed there for the purpose of giving light.'

The bookseller declared that he was going to be ruined, and offered to give Peter double the lump sum he had at first asked, on condition

that he should keep his 'copy' within reasonable bounds, an offer that the writer of 'Whitebrook As It Is' accepted with feigned reluctance but inward rejoicing.

Peter's fame as a genealogist dated from the time when he found a pedigree, a new name, and a coat of arms for the Bellows family. Joe Bellows, its founder, had started life in Whitebrook as a working blacksmith and beershop keeper. He was so illiterate that he could hardly write his own name, yet so shrewd and energetic withal that he won wide renown and a large fortune as a maker of boilers and steam engines. All that he knew of his ancestry was that his father had been transported for life for killing a fellow-workman in a drunken brawl; and when his two sons, to whose industry his success was largely due, suggested that his new carriage could not be considered complete without a crest on the panels he had to be told what a crest was. But he let the lads have their way.

'It maks no difference to me,' said honest Joe, 'what mack' (sort) 'of a pictur they painten on th' panels.'

So Peter Wiswell, who had really a fair smattering of heraldic and archæologic lore, was called into council, and speedily produced a coat-of-arms and a crest which made a very pretty show when emblazoned on the new carriage. Nor was this all. Joe's children did not like their name. It was bad that the father was generally spoken of as Old Bellows (among the hands in familiar converse this became 'Owd-Bellies-to-Mend'), but what most hurt their feelings was, that the family at large should always be designated as 'them Bellowses.' This grievance suggested to Peter one of his happiest inspirations—rather, let us say, one of his most remarkable discoveries. He found out that the true, original name of the family was not Bellows at all, but Bellasis. Bellows was a modern corruption, a proposition which Peter supported by documentary proof—extracts from registers and so forth—and a pedigree that carried conviction to the minds of the entire family, except the head of it, who, when it was proposed to change his name, swore with a big oath that Joe Bellows he was born and Joe Bellows he would die. But few men can with-

stand the importunity of wife and children ; and the old blacksmith and boiler-maker is described, on the marble tablet which chronicles his virtues and records his death, as ‘ Joseph Bellasis, Esq., deputy lieutenant and justice of the peace of this county,’ and his grandchildren, if not his children, are fully convinced that they come of an aristocratic stock.

In short, Peter was a genius ; and, as may be supposed, he had not much difficulty in providing Mr. Ryvington with a pedigree entirely to his satisfaction. Knowing his man, he did not hesitate to give him a very distinguished ancestry indeed. Perhaps the only person at Whitebrook who believed that the Ryvingtons were akin to the royal house of Barbarossa was the owner of Deepdene himself.

As for Wiswell, his celebrity as a genealogist won for him the name of ‘ Pedigree Peter,’ a name which he retained to the day of his death.

CHAPTER XVIII.

FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

DORA was as good as her word. The spring following Randle's memorable excursion in Switzerland, she returned from Nyon under the escort of her brother, reaching Deepdene a few days before Robert Ryvington's twenty-first birthday, and in time to take part in the informal council which was held to consider in what manner the event should be celebrated.

'I am going to Redscar this afternoon, Dora,' said Mr. Ryvington, as they were taking breakfast together the morning after his daughter's arrival; 'will you bear me company? I daresay your aunt would like to see you.'

'Certainly, papa. It is my duty to see Aunt Sophia, you know, and I think I should have gone to Redscar to-day—at any rate, to-morrow

—even if you had not been going. What is going to be done about Bob's birthday?

‘That is one of the things we have to talk about. Your aunt hinted the other day that they would like to have my advice, though I am not sure that I shall give it.’

‘Why not, papa?’ asked Dora, in a tone of some surprise; for she had observed that advice was the only thing her father ever gave freely.

‘Well, you see, Dora, my authority as executor ceases the day Robert is of age. He goes into partnership with Randle, and henceforth they conduct the concern on their own responsibility. I shall have nothing more to do with it.’

‘But if they ask your advice, you know?’

‘It is exactly what they have not done. Your aunt has, but I have had to complain ever since my brother's death of the little attention the young men have paid to my wishes. I am only afraid, now that they are their own masters, they will make ducks and drakes of the property; and I should be sorry indeed if the concern were to go down. But I fear it will; I fear it will.’

‘But I thought Randle was such a good business man, papa. I have heard people say

that the Redscar mills are almost the best managed in Whitebrook.'

'Who says so?'

'Why, did not that Mr. Riser who was here last night say so?'

'Ah, yes, I remember. But he forgets that Randle has never yet been left to himself. Since his father's death he has always had me to look after him; and, though he has not observed my advice as he ought to have done, my position as executor has enabled me to veto more than one questionable scheme. And he has notions about treating the hands that will never answer.'

'How, papa?'

'Why, he thinks he can rule them by kindness; but he'll find it out; they will let him see.'

'But is it not our duty as Christians, papa, to treat everybody with kindness, whether they are hands or not? You know we are told to love our neighbours as ourselves.'

'Do you consider that our workpeople are our neighbours, then?'

'Cousin Randle's workpeople are his neighbours at any rate, papa.'

‘You are much too literal, Dora,’ rejoined her father, tersely. ‘Besides, girls do not understand these things. When you are older, you will think differently. But I must be going; I have an appointment with Riser at nine o’clock. How that man has got on, to be sure! I can remember him being a weaver at Redscar, and now he wants to take land for another loom shed, and he has nearly one thousand looms already.’

‘Will Randle go with us to Redscar?’ asked Dora, who did not seem greatly interested in Mr. Riser and his looms.

‘I am sure I don’t know. You can ask him when he comes down to breakfast. I shall be out all morning. We leave at two o’clock, remember; I have some matters of business to arrange with my nephews.’

‘Very well, papa. I will be ready.’

Half an hour after Mr. Ryvington’s departure, his son Randle sauntered languidly into the morning-room, where the Ryvingtons generally breakfasted when they were without guests.

‘How late you are, Randle!’ said his sister. ‘It’s past nine o’clock!’

‘Nine o’clock ! Do you call that late ? I call it early.’

‘It seems very late to me. At Villa Artemisia we breakfasted in summer at half-past six, and in winter at seven o’clock.’

‘That is all very well for Swiss schoolgirls,’ yawned Deep Randle, as he drew a chair to the table and cut himself a slice of ham, ‘but you won’t persuade me to breakfast either at half-past six or half-past seven, nor even half-past eight. Pour me out a cup of tea, there’s a good girl. Where has the governor gone ?’

‘He’s gone to see Mr. Riser about some land.’

‘Glad to hear it. That means an addition to the value of the estate. I hope my father will make Mr. Riser pay a good price. I think he will, for our revered parent is not easily beaten at a bargain. What are you going to do with yourself to-day, Dora ?’

‘Papa and I are going to Redscar after luncheon. Papa has something to arrange with Randle and Bob, and I want to see Aunt Sophia. Will you go with us, Ran ?’

‘No, I don’t think I shall.’

‘Why ? I am sure Aunt Sophia and the cousins would be glad to see you.’

‘I am not. At least, so far as the cousins are concerned, and Aunt Sophia wearies me with her canting conversations.’

‘Aunt Sophia never cants, Randle. She has her faults, perhaps—who has not ?—but insincerity is not one of them ; and she is always very kind.’

‘I will say, then, by her frequent references to religion, and the tacit assumption of infallibility, which is the badge of that party in the Church to which she belongs. She speaks of me as worldly, I believe ; that means, I suppose, that I am not, like herself, a self-elected saint. At any rate, I am as saintly as either of her sons, even as that paragon of perfection, my cousin and namesake. Did you hear of that wonderful exploit of his in Switzerland—the rescue of Lord Lindisfarne’s daughter, I mean ?’

‘Yes, I heard ; what then ?’ replied Dora, with a contemptuous curl of her lip.

‘What then ! Why, it is all a cram, or at any rate a gross exaggeration.’

‘You don’t mean what you say, Randle ; you

cannot mean it,' exclaimed Dora, passionately.

You know as well as I know that Randle Ryvington of Redscar is utterly incapable of telling a deliberate falsehood.'

'Oh, we are indignant, are we?' said the other, with a sneer. 'Well, since you put it in that way, Dora, let me tell you that I don't know that my cousin Randle—or anybody else, for that matter—is utterly incapable of telling a deliberate falsehood, if the inducement is sufficient.'

'Oh, Randle, if you talk like that,' rejoined the girl, in a voice trembling with emotion, 'you will make me almost dislike you. But you cannot mean what you say. You are only trying to tease me. Besides, I know that my cousin did rescue Lady Muriel Avalon, when she was run away with in the Furca Pass.'

'How do you know? Were you there?'

'No, but I saw an account of it in the *Gazette de Lausanne*.'

'I don't know anything about the *Gazette de Lausanne*,' answered Deep Randle, whose scepticism this statement seemed somewhat to shake. 'But just tell me this. If my cousin

really did what he says he did, he laid the Lindisfarne family under a great obligation. Yet they take not the slightest notice of him. He said he was going to see them at Avalon Priory, but he has never been, and, so far as I know, has received no communication from them. Is it credible that if he had rendered them so important a service they would not acknowledge it in some way ?

‘The invitation never came, then ?’

‘Not it—shouldn’t we all have known if it had ? I have asked Randle two or three times when he was going to Avalon Priory. The last time I asked him he seemed rather waxy, and wanted to know what business it was of mine ; so, seeing the subject was a delicate one, I just let it drop.’

‘I don’t wonder he was vexed. Such ingratitude would vex anybody, let alone your sneers, and I daresay you did sneer,’ exclaimed Dora, with great warmth. ‘But I don’t care. Randle did rescue Lady Muriel, and nearly lost his life by trying to get up the body of the governess from the place where it had fallen. I am as sure of it as if I had been there myself ;

and, after what he has done, the conduct of the Lindisfarnes is simply disgraceful. If Randle is vexed it is because of their ingratitude. As for their invitation, I don't believe he cares for it one bit. I don't believe, if it came now, he would accept it.'

'Not care for an invitation from the Earl of Lindisfarne?' rejoined Randle, with a mocking laugh. 'I pity your innocence, Dora. Why, it is exactly what he does care for. He would give his ears for an invitation.'

'You would, I daresay. But I will talk no more with you, Randle. I shall not be able to keep my temper if I do. Do you want any more tea? I am going into the garden.'

'No, I don't want any more tea. By all means go into the garden if you want to go.'

'If that young lady is not in love with her cousin Randle,' muttered her brother, as the door closed behind Dora, 'the female mind is an unfathomable mystery.'

They met a little later in the garden, as Randle was returning from the stables, when Dora again asked him to accompany her father and herself to Redscar. He again declined, but

this time a little more graciously, adding that as he was under a long-standing engagement to be present at an agricultural show in the neighbourhood he could not go if he would. Dora had her doubts as to the entire accuracy of this statement; but it was so far satisfactory that it might seem to account for her brother's non-appearance at Redscar.

During the remainder of the morning Dora thought of little else than her cousin and the Lindisfarnes. Though since Randle's visit to Nyon she had not once heard from him, she never doubted that he had made the contemplated visit to Avalon Priory; she had even reproached him in her thoughts for his failure to write to her as he had promised, a failure which she was disposed to attribute to the fascinations of Lady Muriel, with whom she made up her mind that he had fallen in love. The news that he had not been to Avalon Priory at all was almost startling. This contingency was one the possibility of which had never occurred to her. Despite her brother's assurance that Randle had received no communication from Lord Lindisfarne since their

parting at Brigue, Dora finally came to the conclusion that it was more probable he had received and refused—for reasons best known to himself—an invitation, than that he should not have received one at all, a refusal with which she had a vague suspicion that she herself might be not remotely connected.

This theory was, however, rather rudely shaken by a conversation she had with her father on their way to Redscar. She told him what had passed between her brother and herself on the subject, and asked him what he thought about it.

‘It’s a very strange affair,’ said Mr. Ryvington. ‘I don’t understand it at all.’

‘But are you sure, papa, that Randle has received no communication whatever from Lord Lindisfarne?’

‘He says he has not.’

‘How long ago did he say so?’

‘I don’t know exactly how long. Three or four months, perhaps.’

‘May he not have heard something since?’

‘He may, of course; but, when I saw that Randle did not like being questioned on the

subject, I questioned him no more. He's rather testy if you tread on his corns, my nephew is. Still I don't think he has heard. If he had received an invitation to Avalon Priory we should all know, of course.'

'But suppose the invitation was so long delayed, or so coldly given, that Randle, feeling hurt, declined it, and told nobody?'

Mr. Ryvington, instead of replying, shrugged his shoulders and smiled. No more than his son could he believe in the possibility of anybody refusing an invitation from an earl, whether long delayed or coldly given.

'I know what you mean, papa, but I am sure that Cousin Randle is quite capable of declining an invitation from Lord Lindisfarne, or any other lord. But you surely don't share in my brother's opinion that Randle never met the Lindisfarnes, and that it is all a made-up story?'

'No,' said the old gentleman, reflectively. 'It is queer, certainly—very queer; but I don't think that. As I have said before, though my nephew Randle is not always as respectful as he might be, he is, I believe, an honest man. At

any rate, he is not a fool, and I do not see what he could hope to gain by inventing such a story, and above all by saying that he was going to Avalon Priory, if he had no ground to go upon. Such a proceeding could only bring upon him discredit and expose him to ridicule. As it is, many people believe that it was a piece of bounce—about the invitation, I mean.’

‘Did he tell many people, then?’

‘No, I don’t think he did; but these things get out, you know. Your brother mentioned it to the Stalmynes and one or two others—that is what makes him so sore; and, for my own part, I did not think it my duty to make a secret of it, you know. I did not see the necessity. Altogether, it has been a very annoying piece of business for us all.’

Mr. Ryvington judiciously omitted to mention that both he and his son had told pretty nearly everybody they knew of Red Randle’s exploit in the Furca Pass, and of his expected visit to Avalon Priory. They had even gone so far as to hint that Lord Lindisfarne was expected at Whitebrook in the course of the winter, and that Mr. Ryvington, as head of the family,

would give a grand dinner in his honour at Deepdene, to which all the gentry of the neighbourhood were to be invited.

‘I am glad, however, papa, that you do not think, with my brother, that Randle has been deliberately deceiving us.’

‘No, I don’t think so,’ replied Mr. Ryvington, but rather less confidently than before, for the conversation had revived the bitterness of his disappointment about the dinner party, on which he had counted to launch himself, once for all, into county society. ‘But I do not think that the matter requires explanation. Either the Earl of Lindisfarne said he would have my nephew at Avalon Priory or he did not. If he did say so, why has the invitation never come? The supposition that his lordship has failed in his promise is not admissible, for noblemen of his rank are always as good as their word. *Noblesse oblige*, you know. At the same time, I should be sorry to think that my nephew, for some incomprehensible reason——’

‘Your nephew is quite incapable of doing anything dishonourable,’ interrupted Dora,

impetuously. 'I know very little about noble-men and their ways, but I do know Cousin Randle; and I would rather take his word than that of any duke or earl or baron in the kingdom. In my opinion, Lord Lindisfarne and his wife, and his daughter, whose life my cousin saved, are ungrateful wretches. Their treatment of him is disgraceful; they may be noble, but they are not gentle. The acquaintance of such people is no honour; I would rather associate with honest factory folks.'

'Dora, Dora, what are you saying?' exclaimed her father, almost breathless with astonishment at the vehemence of his daughter's language. 'Never let me hear you utter such sentiments again. They are low, they are radical, they are unladylike, they are—in fact they are bad form in every way. I do hope they have not turned you into a nihilist, or a republican, or something equally dreadful, at Villa Artemisia. If I thought so, I do believe——'

Mr. Ryvington's belief in the matter was destined never to be known, for the suggestion that she could possibly have learnt anything politically heterodox from Mademoiselle Vieu-

temps tickled Dora so much that she interrupted her father with a merry laugh.

‘Why, don’t you know, papa dear, that mademoiselle is far more conservative than you are yourself? She adores the memories of Louis XVI. and Marie Antoinette, hates all republics with undying hatred, and would rather have a rattlesnake in her house than a radical. Oh, Mademoiselle Vieutemps is the most correct person in the world, I do assure you.’

‘I am very glad to hear it; but where have you got your ideas, then? I am sure you did not get them at Deepdene.’

‘I do not think I did,’ replied Dora, with a look which, if her father’s quickness of apprehension had been on a par with his sharpness at making a bargain, he would have understood to imply that, in her opinion, Deepdene was not a place especially rich in ideas.

‘Well, then, I hope you will get rid of them at Deepdene; for they are not ideas that I like my daughter to hold. But here we are at Red-scar. Driffield will drive you up to the house. I will get out here and walk down to the mill, where I have to meet my nephews.’

CHAPTER XIX.

A PEACE-OFFERING.

WHEN Mr. Ryvington joined his daughter at Redscar House he was in high good humour. His nephews had presented him with a handsome chronometer repeater, striking the hours and quarters, furnished with a perpetual calendar, and emblazoned with the Ryvington arms. They offered it to him, Randle said, as a token of their respect, and in acknowledgment of his services as executor during Robert's minority. The old gentleman was lifted into the seventh heaven of delight, and expressed his thoughts in a long, but slightly incoherent speech; and when he showed the watch to Dora it was easy to see, by her kindling eye and the increased animation of her countenance, that she, too, was deeply gratified.

In answer to an inquiry from herself and her father, Randle said that he had ordered the watch at Geneva, but that watches with highly complicated movements are only cased, finished, and regulated in that city, the mechanism being made in the valley of Joux, near the lake of that name, in the Vaudois Jura. He further told them that, albeit that Genevan and other watchmakers sell timekeepers of complex construction as entirely their own manufacture, they are an exclusive speciality of the Joux Valley, the horologists of no other locality, in Switzerland or out of it, being able to make these movements, or at any rate to make their production a commercial success.

‘Well, I suppose there are tricks in all trades, and you were always clever at rooting things out, Randle,’ said Mr. Ryvington, whose present disposed him to be complimentary. ‘I have heard your poor father say it of you many a time, and I have perceived it myself. It is an excellent quality in a business man, that power of rooting things out—getting to the bottom of ’em, eh, Bob? I was good at rooting things out myself when I was a young fellow.

They could not palm much false-packed cotton on me, those Liverpool fellows. I always took the cotton buying when I was in the concern, you know. Well, about this watch, you know' (regarding it complacently), 'as I told you down at the counting-house, I shall prize it and wear it as long as I live. I consider it my duty to do so, and after my death I shall give it—I mean before my death I shall transmit it as an heirloom to my son, to remain in the family as—as—yes, as an everlasting memorial of this day—of Bob's twenty-first birthday, I mean.'

Mrs. Ryvington gave her sons a significant glance, which they both rightly interpreted as meaning 'I told you so.' The idea of the present had, in fact, originated with her, and been carried out almost at her sole instance, for Randle did not regard the project with much favour, and Robert had vigorously opposed it.

'We owe Uncle Randle no gratitude,' he had said, 'and I will be no party in making him a present.'

Randle knew his mother's motive. The relations between the two families had become unpleasantly strained, and in the interest of

peace and goodwill she was desirous to mark the occasion of Robert's majority by strengthening the fast-weakening ties which had formerly united Deepdene and Redscar. She had also another and less disinterested motive; for, whatever might be the case with the elect, Mrs. Ryvington in her dealings with the world showed much more of the cunning of the serpent than the meekness of the dove. She feared that a feud between Redscar and Deepdene might militate against the interests of her sons. She could not foresee exactly how, but she had a very strong presentiment to that effect; and on general grounds she was of opinion—an opinion which she strove very earnestly to impress on Randle and Robert—that young people, at the outset of life, should spare no pains to make friends; and that, seeing the wealth and the influence of their uncle, it was well worth their while (worldly speaking) to be on good terms with him. In the end she had her way, and the watch was bought, although neither Randle nor Robert was quite convinced that the gift would have all the effect she anticipated from it.

‘It may please my uncle, though I am not quite sure even about that,’ said Randle; ‘but it will not propitiate my cousin. He is no friend of ours, and never will be, do what we may. However, let it be as you say, mother. It is well to try to promote goodwill, even if we have little hope of success.’

The mention of Bob’s birthday by Mr. Ryvington suggested the question as to how it should be kept.

‘Robert wants to give a dinner party and a dance,’ observed Mrs. Ryvington, in a tone as serious as if she were discussing the day of judgment; ‘but a dinner party would give a vast deal of trouble, and dancing, I am afraid, is very worldly. Besides, it is hardly two years since his father died, and it might be thought we were not paying proper respect to his memory. No, I do not think I should like to have a dance in the house.’

Bob, to whom these arguments did not altogether commend themselves, was on the point of asking his mother if she objected to a dance out of the house, when he was anticipated by Dora.

‘Well, then,’ she said, ‘suppose we have a picnic, aunt. Take some carriages, start early in the morning, and have a long day in the country.’

‘Capital,’ exclaimed Bob, who at length saw his way to the much-longed-for dance; ‘I beg leave to second that motion.’

‘Yes,’ said Mrs. Ryvington, who felt that Dora’s plan would remove a great weight from her mind, for there was nothing she more disliked than such a disturbance of the regularity of her household arrangements as the giving of a party would have entailed. ‘I think that would be very nice. What do you think, Randle?’ (to her brother-in-law).

‘I quite agree with you, Sophia; nothing could be nicer. But, look here, why not have your picnic at Deepdene? We have plenty of room in the park, and we will have dinner or tea, or something, out in the open, under the trees. Yes, by all means come to Deepdene. And then after sunset, you know, we could light up the terrace and the garden with Chinese lanterns.’

‘That would be very, very nice, papa, but I

do not think it is exactly what we want. We want a long drive in the country; the drive would be the best part of it. Don't you think so, Bob? It has to be your entertainment, you know. I am only suggesting.'

'You express my opinion exactly, Dora—the drive, by all means. At the same time we are very much obliged to Uncle Randle for the offer.'

'Yes, it is very kind of papa; but we mean to have a *fête champêtre* at Deepdene all the same, although not on Bob's birthday. But I don't believe in eating on the grass—there are always nasty earwigs and ants and things about.'

'Well, everything considered, I prefer sitting on a chair myself,' observed Bob, sententiously. 'Could we not regale ourselves in some country inn and——'

'And get up a dance,' he was going to say, but fearing some objection from his mother he prudently checked himself in time.

'An excellent idea, Bob,' rejoined Dora, 'I vote for the country inn. Don't you think so, Cousin Randle?'

‘It’s Bob’s birthday we are going to keep, you know, and whatever pleases you and him will please me. Yes, let us have the drive and the country inn, by all means.’

Thereupon followed an animated conversation as to the direction they should take, and it was finally decided to drive to Salley Abbey, and after a ramble by the Ribble to hold their revels in the inn at Chatburn.

All the available vehicles of the two families were to be placed in requisition, and if those did not suffice additional carriages were to be hired at Whitebrook.

‘You will come, of course, uncle?’ said Randle.

‘Certainly,’ answered Mr. Ryvington, as he trifled with the chain of his new repeater. ‘It will be a great pleasure, and even if it were not a pleasure it would be my duty to be present on the occasion. We old folks—your mother and I, you know—and my sister will all go together in our pony phaeton.’

‘No, Randle, you must let me stay at home,’ said Mrs. Ryvington, as she laboriously rubbed her spectacles with her pocket-handkerchief.

‘Randle and Robert will both be away, and there is no telling what might happen. I shall be quite happy here, thinking how you are all enjoying yourselves.’

‘Bother!’ exclaimed Bob. ‘How can anything happen? It won’t be the first time the place has been left to itself for a day.’

‘I should not be content, I am sure I should not.’

‘Oh, but we cannot do without you, aunt,’ put in Dora.

‘You really must go with us, Sophia,’ observed Mr. Ryvington. ‘I consider it is nothing less than your duty to go.’

‘I think you had better make one of us, mother,’ said Randle, quietly, putting his hand on hers; ‘you know Bob will never be twenty-one again. This is the last coming of age we shall have to celebrate.’

Thus pressed Mrs. Ryvington was constrained to yield, albeit not without a long-drawn sigh and a deprecatory shake of the head, as if to signify that she was of the same opinion still and yielded only to overwhelming force.

‘You made a mistake just now, Cousin Ran-

dle,' remarked Dora, when this knotty point had been settled. 'Bob's coming of age is not the last we shall have to celebrate, unless indeed you count on my never being twenty-one. Be good enough to remember that even now I am in my twentieth year.'

'I beg your pardon very much, Dora,' laughed Randle. 'I meant our family, of course. I hope we shall live to celebrate your majority in a manner becoming the occasion.'

'Please God, we may,' sighed Mrs. Ryvington, who was feeling decidedly unhappy at the idea of the house and the mills being deserted by every member of the family for a whole day. 'But there is no telling what may happen. We know not what a day may bring forth, and your uncle and I are getting into years; maybe——'

'You forget that other text, mother,' interposed Randle, who could see that her last remark was not at all to his uncle's liking. "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." We have now to decide how many we shall ask, and whom.'

'All right,' said Bob, 'and then we shall be

able to organise the transport and commissariat departments. We shall ask the Bellasis, don't you think ?'

'I suppose so,' replied Randle, though with a shade of hesitation in his voice. 'They are rather stuck up and give themselves airs, it is true; but we are on friendly terms with them, and they are likely to take it amiss if we don't ask them.'

'Yes, you had better ask them,' observed Mr. Ryvington, gravely. 'They are doing a splendid business, I am told, and I know they are rich. Old Joe left those lads very well off, and they know how to take care of it' (their fortune, Mr. Ryvington probably meant).

'Yes,' said Randle, 'he left his two sons more than £100,000, and his daughter only £15,000. I don't think that right.'

'I differ from you there, Randle,' said his uncle. 'I look upon £15,000 as being a very handsome fortune for a girl.'

'She was just as much Joe Bellasis's child as William or Henry, and she ought to have been left equal with them. Besides, they have the business, which is a fortune in itself.'

‘Anyhow,’ interposed Bob, rather irrelevantly, and perhaps somewhat more emphatically than the occasion required, ‘Flora Bellasis is a deuced fine girl.’

‘Robert!’ exclaimed his mother, in a tone of horror, ‘what *are* you saying?’ The poor lady entertained a shrewd suspicion that her second son had a weakness for the sex which might some day lead to unpleasant results, and she feared that the admiration he expressed for Miss Bellasis pointed to a possibility that she would have strongly deprecated; for, ‘fine’ as the young lady in question undoubtedly was, Mrs. Ryvington did not look upon her as an eligible daughter-in-law.

‘I don’t care what you say, mother,’ returned Bob, rather sulkily, for he thought it was high time she ceased to treat him as a child, ‘she is a fine girl.’

‘And a haughty and a proud one,’ said Mrs. Ryvington. ‘She is not a girl I admire. “Handsome is that handsome does.”’

‘Do you know what the hands say about the Bellasis?’ asked Randle, by way of putting a stop to this altercation.

‘No, what do they say?’

‘That old Joe was a rough casting, and his children want to pass themselves off as fine gold.’

‘Ah, ah,’ laughed Mr. Ryvington, ‘not bad, not at all bad. But it serves them right. What business have they to pretend to have a high pedigree, and try to persuade people that they come of an old stock? Very high, indeed, I should think. Why, old Joe’s father was hanged for sheep-stealing, wasn’t he?’

‘I believe there is a tradition of that sort,’ said Randle, ‘but I rather think it was a case of manslaughter and transportation beyond the seas; and maybe, after all, the story is a pure invention. However, it is no business of ours. The only fault I find with the Bellasis is their trying to ignore that which constitutes their chief, if not their only, claim to distinction and respect—the lowness of their origin. It is surely not less honourable to have for forefathers men who have won their bread by the work of their hands than to belong to a family that has lived for generations on the labour of others. Will the time ever come, I wonder—’

‘Don’t you think it would be well to settle about the invitations, Randle? Perhaps there is somebody you might like to ask,’ put in Mrs. Ryvington, who was apprehensive that if her son went on he might say something that would give his uncle as much offence as the repeater had given him pleasure, and so mar all the good effect she anticipated from a present which she regarded both as an investment and a peace-offering.

‘Certainly,’ said Randle, gravely, but inwardly amused at this display of his mother’s anxious watchfulness. ‘Is there anybody in particular you would like us to ask, uncle?’

‘No, I don’t think there is. It is Robert’s party, you know. Had you not better leave the invitations to him?’

‘In consultation with Dora,’ suggested Bob, with a smile. ‘It is too big a job for me to tackle alone, I think.’

‘Agreed,’ said Randle. ‘You and Dora form the invitation and organisation committee. Are you willing, Dora?’

‘I shall be delighted, Cousin Randle, to give Bob every help in my power, and all the benefit

of my experience,' answered Dora, with mock seriousness.

'I am sure we are greatly indebted to you, Miss Ryvington,' returned her cousin, gravely. 'And now, I think, we may consider this meeting adjourned until the day on which Bob becomes a man.'

CHAPTER XX.

BOB'S BIRTHDAY.

THE sun rose auspiciously on Robert Ryvington's birthday, and the promise it gave of brilliant weather was justified by the event. The guests numbered more than a score, without reckoning the people from Deepdene and Redscar. The first vehicle to leave was a large waggonette, drawn by four horses, in which rode Robert and most of the maiden and bachelor members of the party. The rear was brought up by carriages which were chiefly affected by the married and middle-aged. Randle Ryvington of Deepdene, who looked upon the whole proceeding as being somewhat beneath him, and accepted his cousin's invitation only out of deference to the paternal wish, had chosen to drive his own drag, and was

accompanied by his particular friends, Mr. and Mrs. Tom Cliviger. Not caring to be publicly identified with what he rather scornfully described to the lady and gentleman aforesaid as a juvenile picnic, he did not leave Deepdene until the others were well on the road.

In the waggonette that led the van there rode, besides Robert and Randle, Dora, Miss Flora Bellasis, her brother William, and five or six others.

Flora fully answered to Bob's description of her as a fine girl. Though rather tall, she was exceedingly well proportioned, and her dark hair and eyebrows, brilliant complexion, and regular, if somewhat too heavy, features would almost have rendered her worthy to be called beautiful if she had not posed as a beauty, and sought by every petty artifice of which she was mistress to call attention to her charms. Although the criticism she thus challenged was not always favourable to her claims, she had many admirers among the young men of Whitebrook; but the one she most desired to captivate, Red Ryvington, had hitherto shown an insensibility to her attractions as provoking as

it was incomprehensible. As for Bob, she looked upon him as a boy ; but as it was easy to see that he admired her, a sentiment that, with time, might not improbably develop into something warmer, she judiciously decided to give the young fellow a little encouragement, to keep him in hand, as it were, so that, if the elder brother should fail her, there might be somebody else to fall back upon. It must not, however, be supposed that Miss Bellasis was a mere man-hunter, for, as she one day confided to her friend, Mrs. Tom Cliviger, she could have had half-a-dozen offers any day by lifting up her little finger. But she fully believed in the Bellasis pedigree, and had made up her mind that the Ryvington family was the only family in Whitebrook into which it would not be beneath her to marry.

William Bellasis was a gay young bachelor of forty, heavy as to build and stolid as to countenance. The greatest of his minor troubles was the bigness of his hands, a peculiarity which he probably inherited from his iron-working ancestors, and which he sought to minimise by wearing the tightest-fitting gloves

he could thrust his fingers into. He affected, moreover, an airiness of attire, particularly in the matter of neckties, which were often of gorgeous hue, that, together with a habit he had of sporting a bright flower in his button-hole, had procured for him among the Whitebrook people the name of 'Blooming Bill.'

Notwithstanding his foibles, William Bellasis was an acute man of business and a shrewd politician. He was chairman of the Whitebrook Conservative Committee, and his powers of organisation were highly thought of by his party.

Whitebrook men never come together, however sad, solemn, or festive may be the occasion of their meeting, without talking shop, and the wagonette was hardly under way when Blooming Bill introduced the topic that was ever uppermost in his mind by asking Randle if he had anything fresh in business. Randle answered in the negative, and gave his gossip the opening he desired by inquiring in turn if he had anything new.

'Only that there's trouble brewing among the hands,' said the other, 'they're getting confoundedly uppish, that's what they are. I've

just had a rumpus with our chaps, and had to give in too.'

'Indeed! How was that?'

'Well, you see, we've got some rather good contracts lately. We've one for ten locomotives from Australia; we are making a pair of fifties for Riser's new factory, and we are fitting the Blackmoor colliery up with new engines and pumping gear. One way and another we've jobs on hand that will keep us busy for six or eight months. Well, the beggars got wind of this, and last Saturday they sent a deputation to my brother and me to say that if we did not give them an advance of five per cent. all round they'd knock off work. I told them at first to go to the devil, but when we came to talk it over it was plain to see that there was nothing for it but submission. We could not afford a turn-out—that's the plain truth—so we just gave them what they asked for. But it was a very unfair thing to do, and I shall not soon forget it. If hands take advantage that way, it will be impossible soon to do any business at all.'

'Upon my word, Bellasis,' said Randle, 'I

don't see that you have much cause for complaint. You got off very cheaply; the men might have asked ten per cent., you know.'

'What, Mr. Ryvington! You, an employer of labour, think that hands are justified in taking advantage of their masters being under contract?'

'Why not?'

It was clear from the bewilderment expressed in Mr. Bellasis's countenance that this question had never before either occurred or been put to him. In disputes between masters and men he always assumed that the masters were in the right, or, conversely, that the hands were in the wrong, and he had not believed it possible that there could be any difference of opinion as to the recent conduct of his own workpeople. Nevertheless, being somewhat slow of utterance, and not very quick of thought, he did not find it very easy to answer Randle's question.

'Because,' he said, after a rather long pause, 'it is not right. I mean it is not right to take an unfair advantage.'

'There I quite agree with you. But I don't

see that your men were taking an unfair advantage. Political economists are never tired of telling us that labour is a commodity, the price of which is regulated by supply and demand, and the cost of living. Hence your men, having something to sell—to wit, their labour—have the same right to sell it to the best advantage, as you have to sell your engines for the utmost you can obtain. You have pressing need of their services for the next few months, and they, in the exercise of their strict right, profit by the circumstance to demand a higher price for their labour.’

‘That is all very well, Ryvington, as to theory; but come to practice. How can I ever take a contract again if I know that the day it comes to their knowledge the beggars will be down on me for a rise?’

‘How do you secure yourself against a rise in the price of iron when you make a contract for engines?’

‘By making a contract for iron at the lowest prices of the day.’

‘Why not adopt a similar course with your men?’

‘Why, if I did that I should never be able to take a contract without asking their leave. Nay, by Jingo!’

‘You may call it asking their leave if you like. I should call it making a bargain. It seems to me a very easy matter to call your people together, tell them you are tendering for some large contracts, and inquire if, in the event of your obtaining them, they will agree to work until their completion at whatever wages you can afford to give them.’

‘Nay, by Jingo, we have not come to that yet. I’d rather take my chance.’

‘Very good. But then you must not complain if your men, knowing that you are busy, and have need of them, profit by the opportunity to ask a higher price for their services.’

‘It is all very fine talking, Ryvington,’ replied Blooming Bill, whose strong point was not readiness of reply, ‘but just wait a bit until the shoe pinches you, and then we shall hear what you will say. And it will pinch you, take my word for it, and soon. There’s going to be a big turnout at Ribbleton, and the factory hands at Whitebrook are deuced fractious; at any

rate, they are at our Nova Zembla mill.'

'Yes, I have heard there is trouble brewing at Ribbleton, but I fancy we shall escape it at Red-scar. We hardly consider ourselves as belonging to Whitebrook, you know. But it is not wise to meet troubles half-way ; sufficient for the day is the evil thereof.'

'Come, now, I like that, Randle,' put in Bob, with a serio-comic air. "'Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof"—the day being my birthday. I suppose you and Mr. Bellasis consider the whole thing a bore. A nice compliment to the ladies, 'pon my word. Did you hear what my brother was saying just now, Miss Bellasis? "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof." A pleasant sentiment for a fellow to hear the day he comes of age, isn't it?'

'We were not talking about you, Bob; we were discussing business,' replied Randle, with a smile.

'That I can well believe,' said Miss Bellasis, sarcastically, as she adjusted one of her bracelets on her shapely arm ; 'my brother talks business everywhere, in season and out of season. It is business at our house morning, noon, and night.

I wish with all my heart there was no business. You are very fortunate, Miss Ryvington' (turning to Dora), 'in not having any brothers in business.'

'I am not very sure about that,' returned Dora. 'I rather think my brother finds having nothing to do hard work sometimes. Depend upon it, Miss Bellasis, if your brothers were out of business, and did not take to some other occupation, you would have far more cause for complaint than you have now.'

'You are of my opinion, I can see, Miss Ryvington—that every man ought to have some occupation,' observed Bellasis.

'A hobby sometimes answers as well,' said Randle.

'Exactly, because it provides a man with occupation. And, as for business, I daresay we do become too much absorbed in it sometimes. And my brother and I have often matters to talk over at home that we have not time to talk over at the works. But you should not say anything against business, Flora. It has made us what we are.'

'It has helped to retrieve the family fortunes,

I know,' said the young lady, proudly ; 'but the Bellasis were not always in trade, as I daresay you are aware, Miss Ryvington. If Bertram Bellasis of Bowland had not joined Prince Charlie in 1745, and lost all his property, my brothers would not be making engines and boilers at Whitebrook now.'

'Well, I am sure we are all greatly indebted to Bertram Bellasis of Bowland,' said Bob, gravely. 'You see but for him we should not have had the pleasure of your acquaintance, nor of your company to-day. Your misfortune has been our gain, Miss Bellasis.'

'It is really very kind of you to say so, I am sure,' returned Flora, with a gratified smile. 'Still, you know, I cannot help feeling sorry that our ancestor was so unfortunate. But it is some little consolation to know that he did not lose his estates by gambling or speculation, or anything of that sort, but by his devotion to a great cause. How many acres were forfeited to the Crown, William ?'

'I do not just remember—several thousands, I think,' answered William, with a large vagueness becoming the subject and the occasion ;

and there flitted across his face the suspicion of a smile, which suggested to Robert Ryvington, who was rather quick at drawing inferences, the idea that Flora's implicit faith in Peter Wiswell's version of the family history might possibly not be quite so implicitly shared by her brother.

‘He must have had a fine property, this Bertram Bellasis; and it was in a fine country too. Whereabouts in Bowland was it, did you say?’ asked Bob, with an appearance of great interest.

‘Well, you know,’ said Blooming Bill, ‘on that point the family history is just a little obscure—some of the records lost and that, you know. But I don’t think the property was exactly in a ring fence. There were several estates, in different parts of the West Riding, and some in Lancashire. This Bertram Bellasis my sister has been speaking of lived in the neighbourhood of Bolton, I believe; that is where my father came from. The house he lived in was burnt down ages ago. But it is really too bad to inflict all these details upon you. You must find them very tiresome.’

‘Not at all ; I find them very interesting, I assure you. I think the history of old families is one of the most fascinating of studies. You have, of course, paid many visits to the cradle of your race, Miss Bellasis?’

‘I am ashamed to say I have never been there once, Mr. Robert. I have often asked my brothers to take me, but they are always too busy ; and then, until just lately, I have been almost always at school.’

‘Well, then I will tell you what we will do,’ said Bob, with the eagerness of a man who conceives a brilliant idea. ‘You *must* see Bolton, you know. It is not far from Chatburn ; we are well before the others ; we have four good horses ; we will drive to Bolton, take a look at the church, perhaps stroll a few minutes in the park, and get back in time for the banquet. What do you say?’

‘Thank you very much, Mr. Robert,’ exclaimed the young lady, whom the proposition seemed greatly to delight. ‘It will be so awfully nice—don’t you think so, William? I want so much to see Bolton.’

‘What’s that you were saying about a

banquet, Mr. Robert?' asked William, ignoring his sister's question, from which Bob rightly inferred that he did not much care about going to Bolton.

'Oh,' said Bob, carelessly, 'I call it a banquet because I do not know what else to call it. Three o'clock—that is the time fixed, you know—is either too early or too late for dinner, and the wrong time for luncheon. It seemed to require a name out of the common, so I called it a banquet. Perhaps, though, banquet sounds rather too swell, but I don't know any better word.'

'Refection,' suggested Dora.

'Yes, refection is, perhaps, better; but if we could find a word between refection and banquet it would be better still. Can you, Dora?'

Dora had to admit that she could think of no middle term between refection, which signifies a light meal, and banquet, which signifies a rich repast.

'Well, never mind,' Bob went on; 'we will call it refection, then. It will not be grand and rich, but good and substantial, as becomes a country inn. Now look here, this is the pro-

gramme. After the refecton we—that is, those of us that are so disposed—inspect the ruins of the abbey or wander by the banks of the Ribble for an hour or two. Then we return to the inn and have some music, and perhaps a little dancing in the cool of the evening, and drive home by moonlight.’

‘Oh, how nice!’ exclaimed several young ladies in chorus. ‘But where will the music come from?’

‘That is all in perfect order,’ answered Bob, with business-like precision. ‘I have arranged everything. There is a very fair piano at the inn, which I have had tuned expressly for the occasion. A musician is coming from Whitebrook to work it. He brings with him a clever lady harpist and her harp, and a blind man who plays divinely on the harmonium.’

‘Oh, how awfully nice!’ exclaimed the chorus of young ladies.

CHAPTER XXI.

MISS BELLASIS HEARS SOMETHING ABOUT HER
ANCESTORS.

‘**L**OOK there, Dora,’ exclaimed Randle, as the party in the wagonette sighted Salley. ‘See the bright river winding past the ivy-clad, weird-looking ruins of the old abbey—the green pastures and yellow corn-fields, with the background of dark wood towards Bolton Hall. Is it not as beautiful as anything ever seen in Switzerland? And those whitewashed cottages, are they not as picturesque as Swiss chalets?’

‘At any rate they suit the landscape better, and they have the quality of cleanness, which Swiss chalets do not always possess. I do not know how it is, but in Switzerland, I think, no place can compare with it; yet when

I return to England, it seems—where it is not scarred by coalpits and made hideous by long chimneys—the most beautiful country in the world. How do you explain the contradiction, is it natural prejudice?’

‘Well, I suppose we are all more or less prejudiced in favour of our native land, though that would not, of course, account for your preference for Switzerland. Perhaps latest impressions are the strongest. In order to make a fair comparison, it would be necessary to have the most characteristic features of English and Swiss scenery side by side, and look at them together. My own idea is that, while Swiss scenery is unquestionably the finer, our English scenery is the more beautiful. There is nothing in England to compare in grandeur with the Furca Pass, the gorge of the Reuss, or the lake of the four cantons—to say nothing of the Alps; and then there is nothing in Switzerland to equal the rich beauty of this part of the valley of the Ribble, and many another spot in what Shakespeare calls this precious stone set in a silver sea.’

‘And demi-paradise!’ put in Bob. ‘It might

be, perhaps, if it were not quite so muggy at times, and had a better climate of its own.'

'And a little more sunshine,' suggested Dora, 'and a loftier sky, and not quite so much rain.'

'I am not sure about that,' returned Randle, who seemed, as Bob whispered to Dora, to be in an unusually patriotic mood. 'The low sky you speak of is much more favourable to enjoyment than eternally blue skies and glaring sunshine. It mellows the landscape, too, keeps the grass green, and fills the streams. If we had a continental climate, all those fields and meadows would be burnt brown, and the country robbed of more than half its beauty, and ourselves of more than half our energy. Our climate has its faults, but I don't know any other that I would like to exchange it for. It gives us the finest horses, the most beautiful women, and the most laborious working people in the world.'

'Bravo, Ryvington, you express my sentiments to a T,' exclaimed Blooming Bill, whom this laudation of the British climate greatly pleased. 'But here we are at Salley. Do you

mean to drive on without stopping, Robert?’

‘Oh, dear, no; we must stop a few minutes, and let the horses have some meal and water.’

‘Well, then, I shall get out and wait here until you come back.’

‘What, won’t you go on to Bolton with us?’

‘No, thank you. I have been to Bolton several times before. I would rather stroll about here, and go over the ruins of the abbey.’

‘As you like, we shall be back in an hour or so.’

Before Bellasis alighted from the wagonette, he whispered a few words to his sister, to which the only reply she vouchsafed him was a negative and almost angry gesture.

The arrival of a carriage and four at the quiet village of Bolton naturally caused somewhat of a sensation, and a crowd of gossips and sightseers quickly gathered near the church gate, where the wagonette was brought to a stand. All the party alighted and entered the quaint old building. The object that attracted the most attention was the curious monument of Sir Ralph Pudsay (the faith-

ful follower of Henry VI., who sheltered that unfortunate monarch at Bolton Hall after the disastrous battle of Hexham), with the effigies of his three wives and twenty-five children.

‘I don’t see any of the Bellasis amongst them; do you?’ whispered Flora to Bob, by which she probably meant to intimate that she did not see the name of Bellasis recorded anywhere in the church.

‘Nor I,’ answered Bob, with becoming gravity, ‘but they have perhaps got rubbed out; they are so old, you know.’

‘Yes, I daresay that is the reason. I wonder if my ancestors were much respected in the neighbourhood.’

‘Not a doubt of it, I should say. Perhaps you would like to ask? I see there are some very old people near the church gate, there. Shall I inquire if the name is still remembered hereabouts?’

‘Thank you, Mr. Robert; if it would not be too much trouble. I am so anxious to learn all I can about our family, and it is so interesting to be in the place where they lived so long.’

As they crossed the road towards the park, Bob exchanged a few words with an aged villager, and presented him with a shilling, whereupon the old fellow gave a grin of delight, muttered something which Bob did not quite understand, and hobbled off.

‘Confound the old beggar,’ muttered Robert, ‘he has taken me in. He knows nothing.’

They did not linger long among the stately elms and ancient oaks of Bolton Park. The time when they had promised to be back at Sally was nearly up, and after one glimpse at the grey old house, so rich in historic memories, they returned to the village.

As Robert, who was walking with Flora, crossed the road a second time, he was accosted by an ancient woman. She could not have been less than eighty, and might have been a hundred, yet though bent and shrivelled and white-haired, her eyes were not dim, and she seemed sharp of hearing and quick of speech.

‘Which on yo,’ she inquired, with a look directed at Robert, ‘has been axing if onybody here knew aught o’ th’ Bellowsis?’

‘Bellowsis! That must be the local pronun-

ciation of Bellasis,' thought Flora, for she did not remember her father, and the alteration of the name had occurred before she was born.

'Yes, I was asking, on behalf of this young lady, who is a Bellasis,' said Robert. 'Her father came from somewhere hereabouts, I think.'

'Oh, shoo's one o' th' Bellowsis, is shoo? Father's name was Joseph, worn't it?'

'Yes, my papa was Mr. Joseph Bellasis,' answered Miss Bellasis, haughtily, and with a strong emphasis on the 'Mr.,' as if to intimate to the old body that her manner was vastly too familiar.

'Ay, ay,' returned the ancient woman, dreamily. 'I knew Joseph Bellows weel, if ever onybody dud. But that wasn't th' name as he went by i' these pairts, though I allus called him Joseph mysen. He went by th' name o' Joe o' Fat Sam's i' this country. Ay, ay, him and me should ha' been wed! and if we had been, who knows, my bonny wench——'

'Woman, you lie!' exclaimed Flora, who was beside herself with rage, and trembling lest the woman should say something still more unpleasant, for the rest of the party had now come up,

and many of the villagers were within earshot. 'What do you mean by insulting me in this way? My father could never have been married to the like of you.'

'Oh, couldn't he?' said the old woman, quietly, but with an angry twinkle in her dark eyes. 'It was t'other way about. I couldn't be wed to him. Do you know, my proud young lady, why my mother wouldn't let me be wed to him as you call Mr. Joseph Bellasis? It was because his father was sent to Botany Bay for killing Black Ned, fra Slaidburn; and if he hadn't been worse for drink when he dud it, and Ned hadn't provoked him, he'd ha' swung for it. I seed your grandfather, wi' my own een, marched down this here road between two constables, wi' gyves on his wrists, my braw Miss Bellasis.'

'It is not true, it cannot be true,' exclaimed Flora, passionately. 'You are a wicked, wretched old woman to tell such untruths. I will have you punished—put in prison—that I will. Do let us go; please take me away, Mr. Robert.'

As Robert led her to the carriage, she burst into a flood of tears, which he greatly feared might be the forerunner of a fit of hysterics;

but he had under-estimated the young lady's power of self-control, and before they were well out of sight of Bolton she was sufficiently composed to ask him if he could imagine what had induced that wicked old woman to say such terrible things.

'I really cannot tell,' answered Bob, hesitatingly, 'unless it was that you said she lied. That made her mad, I expect.'

'But she did lie, didn't she? You don't think for one moment, Mr. Robert, that what she said was true?'

Seeing that Bob believed every word of the old woman's story, and was moreover rather 'spoons' on Miss Bellasis, this was a sufficiently embarrassing question. But he was a youth of resource, and, by simply saying 'Impossible,' came happily out of the difficulty.

This answer seemed to give the young lady great satisfaction.

'Impossible, indeed,' she exclaimed. 'Impossible and preposterous. But can nothing be done to her—cannot she be punished for telling such untruths? Is there no law against defamation of character?'

‘Not, I am afraid, against defaming the character of one’s grandfather.’

This was an unfortunate answer.

‘And do you really believe, Mr. Robert,’ exclaimed Flora, her voice trembling with indignation, ‘that the wretched convict this miserable woman spoke of was really my grandfather? Don’t you see that there is some dreadful mistake, or that the malignant creature made it all out of her own head, just to annoy me?’

‘Exactly, exactly. Yes, of course, decidedly,’ replied Bob, in some confusion. ‘And that, you see’ (briskly, as if struck by a happy thought) ‘makes it all the more difficult to do anything, for if you could not punish her for slandering your own grandfather, it stands to reason that you could not punish her for slandering some other body’s grandfather.’

‘Still, I should like,’ said Miss Bellasis, vindictively, ‘I should like to do something at that old woman, and at those Bolton people too, for I saw some of them laughing, and they looked as if they believed her. I will certainly speak to my brother about it the moment

we get to Chatburn. I wish he had been here.'

'By all means; that is decidedly the best thing you can do. Yes, it was a pity he did not come,' said Bob, who felt, however, by no means sure that when Blooming Bill heard what had come to pass he would be of the same opinion, nor that apprehension of some such fiasco as had actually occurred was not his motive for staying behind.

When, a few minutes later, they arrived at Salley, they found that the remainder of the party had been waiting for them half-an-hour or more, and that the repast which Robert had described as being something between a confectio and a banquet was ready to be served.

'Well, how did you like Bolton-by-Bowland?' asked William Bellasis of his sister, as they walked towards the inn.

'Not at all,' answered Flora, with an angry toss of her head. 'It's nothing but a common little village, and I was grossly insulted by a wretched old woman—I may say by all the people of the village, for they evidently sympathised with her.'

‘ Well, I wanted you not to go, you know. Who was this old woman, and what did she say ?’

What else passed between the brother and sister was never exactly known ; but, as Robert Ryvington remarked that Miss Bellasis did not refer again to the unpleasant incident at Bolton, and that she rarely thereafter spoke of her family, or boasted of her distinguished ancestry, he drew the conclusion that she had profited by the lesson he had been the unwitting means of giving her.

CHAPTER XXII.

PUDSAY'S LEAP.

SAVE that the viands composing it were cold, the repast that Robert had provided for his guests deserved better the description applied to it by himself than by the word which his cousin had suggested. As touching abundance and variety the meal was rather a banquet than a refection. A splendid Ribble salmon reposed at one end of the table, a magnificent sirloin of beef adorned the other, These lords of the larder were reinforced by an appetising array of side dishes, such as roast capons, boned turkeys, ox tongues, Strasburg pies, and cold hams, over which a small army of bottles, headed by a large contingent of gold-helmed champagne flasks, stood guard.

As Robert, who had occasionally shrewd ideas, albeit he did not always act shrewdly, explained to his guests, he had thought it well to order such a meal as they saw before them, rather than a regulation dinner, for several reasons. In the first place, the day was warm, and hot dishes, he opined, did not go well with hot weather. Then, the house being only a country inn, he did not want to put too great a strain upon its resources ; and last, though not least, as the excursion partook somewhat of a picnic character, it seemed in accordance with the fitness of things that their principal repast should be as little formal as was compatible with comfort.

This explanation was received with warm approval. Everybody applauded Robert's idea, the ladies one and all declaring that a cold collation was greatly to be preferred to a warm dinner, which would have taken up much time which might be used to better purpose than eating.

Bob, who was in such excellent humour that he had forgotten all his grudges against his uncle, requested Mr. Ryvington to take the

head of the table, and, although the old gentleman made a show of resistance on the ground that the place was properly his nephew's, he ended by accepting the honour and carving the sirloin, while Robert took the second place and served out the salmon.

Notwithstanding the drinking of a few toasts, the refection was soon over. The principal health drunk was of course that of the hero of the day, proposed by Mr. Ryvington, who described his nephew as 'an honour to our ancient family and a very promising young man.' Bob blushed, but replied with a point and discretion that surprised many who heard him. When Tom Cliviger proposed the married ladies, and expressed a hope that both Mr. Robert Ryvington and his brother would before long 'enter the land of Uz' (by which he was understood to signify the holy estate of matrimony), Bob blushed again and stole a sly glance at Flora Bellasis, to whom a few glasses of Moët and Chandon had restored the equanimity which the old woman at Bolton had so rudely disturbed. He fancied that she blushed too, and felt flattered and gratified thereat; but seeing

that she had just drunk the greater part of a glass of champagne he may possibly have been mistaken in connecting the young lady's seeming emotion with Mr. Cliviger's witty and suggestive Biblical allusion.

When the toast-drinking came to an end the younger ladies withdrew to equip themselves for the proposed walk, and so soon as they were ready were joined by most of the gentlemen. A few, however, among whom were Mr. Ryvington and his son, Tom Cliviger and William Bellasis, preferred to stay where they were, and round off the repast with brandy and water and cigars.

After a stroll through the ruins of the abbey, where Mrs. Ryvington and Mrs. Ford (Mr. Ryvington's sister-in-law and housekeeper), and a few more of the old and middle-aged signified their intention of remaining until the young folks should return from their walk, the pedestrians set out on their excursion.

The walk chosen by Robert led by the river-side, through fat pastures and green meadows, in which scores of beautifully-marked and heavily-uddered cows were feeding on the rich

grass for which Craven is so famous. The stream, broad, shallow, and bright, was bordered by a row of gnarled old thorns, of age so great that they must have outlived many generations of men. Round some of them, as if seeking the protection of their strength, clung the tender, sweet-scented honeysuckle; and prompted, perhaps, by a kindred feeling, the wild white rose had mingled its pale petals with their dark green leaves. Further on, the valley takes the form of an amphitheatre, the sides of which are clothed with shady woods. The turrets of Bolton are visible in the distance, and old Pendle, his rugged outlines softened by a silvery haze, beams benigantly on the scene.

Among the foremost group of saunterers were Randle, Robert, Dora, Miss Bellasis, and several others, but these gradually fell behind, some to gather wild flowers, others to lie on the grass and listen to the music of the river, others again to take a line of their own; for Bob had declared liberty to be the watchword of the day, and that everyone was free to follow his own fancy.

The brothers were not far from each other,

but it somehow came to pass, rather to Robert's disappointment, that the elder paired off with Miss Bellasis, the younger with Dora; and in this order they strolled until they came to a picturesque part of the river known as Rainsber Scar, or Pudsay's Leap.

The scar is a tall cliff, crowned with noble trees, and mantled with ferns, mosses, and clustering ivy. At its base flows the yet limpid Ribble—soon, alas, to be polluted with unspeakable abominations—mingling its silvery voice with the 'wood-notes wild' of the feathery denizens of the vale.

'Let us sit down here,' said Randle; 'we shall hardly find a lovelier spot to while away a few minutes in, I think.'

The proposal was received with acclamation, and the four seated themselves on the trunk of a fallen elm, not far from the edge of the stream.

'Well, what say you to this, Dora?' continued her cousin, directing her attention by a look to the rustling trees as they bent graciously over the Scar, the gliding river, and the rich emerald of the grass, spangled with cowslips and wild

hyacinths. 'Did you ever see the marrow of it in Switzerland?'

'Your thoughts seem to be running a great deal on Switzerland just now, Randle. Why are you so wishful to know my opinion on the comparative merits of English and Swiss scenery? What does it matter which I prefer? Besides, I have told you already.'

'Yes, I know your general views, but it is well sometimes to descend from generals to particulars. It seems to me that the scenery hereabouts cannot be matched out of England, and I was curious to know if you thought the same.'

'It is certainly very beautiful, but I think I could find the marrow of it, as you say, in the Jura; and in the Jura, moreover, there is hardly a stream, a well, or a mountain that is not consecrated by some quaint or graceful legend, and legends always seem to add to the interest of a place, to throw a glamour over it, as it were, and to heighten the beauty of nature by the charm of association.'

'Well, there is a legend about this place. My brother has been here before, he knows all

about it. Can you tell us the story of Pudsay's Leap, Bob ?'

'I daresay I can, especially as there is very little to tell. William Pudsay, who was the owner of Bolton Hall some time in the sixteenth century, had a lead-mine at Remington-in-Craven. Whether he was a clever metallurgist, and hit upon a method of extracting the silver that lead ore almost invariably contains, or he found a vein of the nobler metal in some other form, nobody knows. Anyhow, as the story runs, silver he got and coined into shillings. And although these shillings were good—better probably than the coin of the realm then current—coining was and is still a royal prerogative, and nobody had a right to make money, save by leave of the sovereign, at that time Queen Bess; who, moreover, by an old law of the realm was seized of all the gold and silver mines in the kingdom. Thus Mr. Pudsay committed a double crime. He appropriated the Queen's silver and illegally stamped it with Her Majesty's image and superscription. When this came to the old lady's ears, as it did in course of time, for Pudsay flooded all Yorkshire

and Lancashire with his shillings, she was mighty wroth, and sent off a pursuivant and a *posse*—I think that is the right word—of men-at-arms to catch him and bring him up to London. But our friend William did not believe in being caught. When he heard the men-at-arms come clattering up the avenue he knew that his little game was up, and made up his mind from Bolton to bolt. Calling for his seven-league boots—I mean for his horse, Wanton Grey, which always stood ready saddled in the stable—he jumped on its back, and at the very moment the pursuivant was hammering with his sword-hilt at the front door, and demanding admittance in the Queen's name, Pudsay galloped off towards Rainsber Scar, leaped clean over it down into the river there, and got clear away. And of all the Queen's horses, and of all the Queen's men, there was neither steed nor rider that dared to follow him. The place has been called "Pudsay's Leap" ever since.'

'A rare jump, wasn't it?' added Robert, looking up at the cliff; 'a hundred feet, if it was an inch.'

‘I don’t believe it,’ exclaimed Miss Bellasis.
‘Why, the man would have been killed.’

‘Ah, but you don’t know. You have not read the ballad. Here it is’ (taking a book from his pocket). ‘This contains the true version, I think; but we must not criticise legends too narrowly, you know. Do you criticise your Swiss legends, Dora?’

‘Oh dear, no. We accept them in faith.’

‘Exactly. That is the right thing to do ; it is what I do myself. Well, according to this poetic version, William Pudsay was a very popular gentleman hereabouts, “loved and honoured by every degree,” and a special favourite with the denizens of the nether world, two of whom, Lob and Michel, invited him one moonlight night to revel in Aithera Hoile, a cave up in the woods yonder, and—

“They gave him there a magical bit,
The strangest thing you ever could see,
And charged him aye to remember it,
If ever he chanced to be forced to flee;
For it would nourish a drooping horse
From evening red to morning grey,
And help him by its magical force
To gallop away for the live-long day.”’

‘I wish I had a bridle like that,’ said Bob,

looking up; 'a fellow might ride the same horse to hounds every day of the week, and always be in the first flight. It would save a mint of money in horseflesh, a bridle like that would.'

'Well, you must emulate the example of William Pudsay; try to be a popular gentleman, and make friends with Lob and Michel,' said Dora.

'You think it is all true, then, Miss Ryvington,' exclaimed Miss Bellasis, 'and that this Mr. Pudsay had really a magical bridle!'

'I believe every word of it,' observed Robert, 'only I am afraid that Lob and Michel haunt the woods of Bolton no more. The shriek of the railway whistle, if nothing else, would be enough to scare them away; and I daresay, if the truth were known, they went out long before railways came in.'

'Does the ballad say nothing else?' asked Flora.

'Oh, yes, lots; but I do not think you would care to hear it all read. It tells how he made his money, "thinking no ill;" how he escaped, and how—

“ Out of the gates himself he flung,
Rainsber Scaur before him lay ;
‘ Now for a leap, or I shall be hung,
Now for a leap,’ quoth brave Pudsay !
‘ If of death I must meet the shock,
Since it may no other be,
Better a leap from my own good rock.
Than from a ladder at York,’ quoth he.
Into his steed he drove the spur,
Fearfully did he snort and neigh ;
Yet, though at first he was hard to stir,
Over the Scaur sprung Wanton Grey.”

‘ The last verse seems rather mixed, though. don’t you think ?’ remarked Bob, with an interrogative look. ‘ Which of them was it that did so fearfully snort and neigh—the rider or his horse ?’

‘ The horse, of course. How could the rider snort and neigh ? Why, you were talking only two or three minutes since as if it were almost sacrilege to criticise a legend, and here you are the first to find fault ! I am surprised, Bob.’

‘ Permit me to observe, Miss Ryvington, that I was criticising, not the legend, but the wording of this ballad, which, being quite modern, has nothing sacred about it. I daresay, as you seem to think, the writer does mean that it was

Wanton Grey who snorted and neighed, though he might have been a little more precise ; and a jump like yon is quite enough to make any man snort, and, if not neigh, at any rate, say " nay. " ' "

' Bob, you are becoming insufferable,' exclaimed Dora. ' What a wretched pun ! Have you no more of the ballad ? What became of Pudsay after he leaped the Scar ? ' "

' He galloped off to London as hard as he could go, to ask the Queen's pardon, found Her Majesty on board a ship in the Thames, threw himself on his knees before her, and being a good-looking chap, and her own godchild to boot, she let him off with a wiggling. As the ballad says—

" She gave him her hand to kiss ;
So, while the tear stood in his e'e,
His heart was brought from bale to bliss,
' But no more Pudsay shillings ! ' said she. " "

' Is that all ? ' inquired Miss Bellasis.

' That is all,' answered Bob, putting the book in his pocket. ' And now' (looking at his watch) ' I think we had better be retracing our steps. I expect my musicians have arrived by

this time, and I must see that the preparations for our dance are in proper train.'

'All right,' returned Randle, 'you three go on. I will follow in a few minutes. There are some fine snap-dragons up there, which I would like to get.'

'I will wait for you, Cousin Randle,' said Dora, reseating herself on the fallen elm. 'You two go on' (to Robert and Flora), 'we will come presently.'

Miss Bellasis would have preferred a somewhat different arrangement, but not being of the family she acquiesced in the proposal with seeming alacrity, and went away with the younger brother in the direction of Chatburn.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A COUSINLY TALK.

WHILE Randle gathered his snap-dragons, Dora sat musing on her elm-tree.

Her cousin's manner puzzled her. Though, since her return home she had seen little of him, she fancied he was quieter and more taciturn than of yore; and if he did not seem less happy, he was decidedly less mirthful. Did the cause, she asked herself, lie in his increasing business responsibilities, or had it some connection with his adventure in the Furca Pass? Could disappointment at not hearing from the Avalons be the source of his melancholy? Was he, after all, as she had jestingly suggested at Villa Artemisia, in love with Lady Muriel? As for her own feelings

towards Randle, they were complex and contradictory. She had a greater liking and respect for him than any man she knew, or was likely to know. If he had asked her to be his wife she would have said 'yes,' without much hesitation. And yet, strange to say, she felt no jealousy of this great lady who, she began to suspect, had really stolen her cousin's heart, albeit she felt indignant at what she deemed her ingratitude, and the ingratitude of her kindred, and deeply sorry that Randle's noble conduct should have brought him only vexation and an unquiet mind. That the disparity in rank between her cousin and Lord Lindisfarne's daughter—even if they should meet again, and all else were favourable—might prove a bar to their union, never so much as occurred to her. Dora's knowledge of the world was not very profound, and it seemed, she thought, only in accordance with the fitness of things that Randle's guerdon should be the hand of the girl who owed him her life—if he asked for it and she returned his love. Her only misgiving was lest, if they did marry, Lady Muriel might not make him happy. She was proud, of course—

that went without saying—and, what would be much worse, she might be gay and frivolous, and always wanting to go to balls and parties ; and Randle did not like balls and parties. He looked upon them, as she had heard him say, as necessary evils, and as involving a frightful waste of time.

It fell out that, when Dora had arrived at this stage of her reflections, she raised her head, a movement which chanced to coincide with Randle's descent from the bank where he had been botanising. The incident interrupted the flow of her thoughts, and suggested to her that she had, perhaps, been travelling a little too fast. She had omitted from her calculations the rather important consideration that Lady Muriel's family, so far from being eager to wed her to Randle, had never, since the parting at Brigue, condescended to acknowledge his existence. She possessed, moreover, no positive evidence that her cousin reciprocated the love which she had once ascribed to Lady Muriel. She might easily be mistaken, but the difficulty was easy of solution. She would ask him. Her cousin and she had always been on good terms. He

had ever treated her in a brotherly fashion, while her feeling for him was that of a sister for a favourite brother. She had no secrets from him, and she felt sure that he would make no difficulty in telling her whether he had lost his heart to Lady Muriel or not.

‘I am glad we let the others go on, Randle,’ she said, so soon as he came back with his snapdragons. ‘I want to have a talk with you. We have not had a talk since I came back, you know.’

‘Talk away then, Dora,’ answered her cousin, rather absently. ‘I am always glad to hear anything you have to say. Is there anything I can do for you?’

‘Talk away, indeed!’ returned Dora, with all her wonted liveliness of manner. ‘It must be the other way about. I want you to talk to me. Have you nothing to tell me?’

‘Nothing very particular, I think,’ replied Randle, seriously, as if he were trying to recall something that might interest her. ‘Oh, yes, I have, though’ (briskly, as if struck by a happy thought). ‘You remember Mary Waddington, that girl who was so badly hurt in our card-

room, and whom you took so much interest in? You will be glad to know that she is quite recovered, and was married the other day to Dick-o'-Dolly's—a decent lad is Dick, and doing well.'

'How provoking you are, Randle! Of course, I am glad to know that Mary Waddington is well, and happily married to Dick-o'-Dolly's. What a name, though! I suppose she will be Mrs. Dick-o'-Dolly's? But it is yourself I want to know about.'

'What do you want to know about me, Dora, that you don't know already?' was Randle's somewhat ungracious answer.

'Well, first of all, is it true that Lord Lindisfarne has not written to you?'

'Quite true.'

'What can be the cause, do you think?'

Randle shrugged his shoulders and walked a little faster.

'I really don't know, Dora, and I don't think I much care.'

This answer, and the manner in which it was given, were so irreconcilable with the theory she had formed that it seemed hardly worth

while to question him further; but, having started the subject, Dora felt that she ought to continue it, if only to express her sense of Lord Lindisfarne's conduct.

‘But cannot you conjecture?’ she said, after a short pause.

‘The only ground on which I can account for Lord Lindisfarne's silence is that he wishes to drop the acquaintance. I am only a Lancashire cotton-spinner, you know, and he is a peer of the realm.’

‘Did you tell him you were a cotton-spinner?’

‘I do not think I did. I said no more about myself than was necessary. It was rather an exciting time, and we were not long together. But I think he understood I was in business. I gave him my address, too, and he must know it is hardly possible for a man to live in a Lancashire manufacturing town and not be in business.’

‘But he promised he would write to you and name a time for you to go to Avalon Priory, did he not?’

‘No. I don't call it a promise. It was merely an expression of his intention to do a

certain thing. Circumstances, or further reflection, have caused him to change his intention, that is all.'

'Still you must feel very much annoyed. You cannot help seeing that you have been treated in an unworthy manner. You have rendered Lord Lindisfarne a priceless service—you saved his daughter's life—and yet, because you happen to be a cotton-spinner, he treats you with contumely. You may say what you like, Randle, I call it shabby in the extreme, and if you are not very much annoyed you ought to be.'

'I do not say that I am not annoyed, Dora,' said Randle, smiling at his cousin's vehemence, 'yet less because Lord Lindisfarne has acted, as you say, shabbily, than that he has acted, as it seems to me, insincerely. I claim no credit for saving his daughter's life; I should have done just the same if she had been his coachman's daughter; and it was quite open to him to have gone on his way without taking further thought about me. But instead of that he and the others showered thanks on me far beyond my deserts, treating me, during the short time we were together, almost as one of themselves,

and pressed me to make them a long visit after their return to England. And I liked them. I had an idea that earls and "ladies" were stiff and formal, if not high and mighty, in manner. But I am bound to say the Avalons were extremely pleasant and agreeable. Their kindness could hardly have been greater if I had been a member of the family. It seems now, though, that it was all put on. I suppose they forgot all about me before I was well out of sight. Yes, Dora, I am disappointed, or, rather, I was. I have given over thinking about it now.'

'And Lady Muriel?'

'Lady Muriel. What about Lady Muriel?'

'You said she was so nice, you know.'

'A little hypocrite, rather! I expect these people make it the study of their lives to be gracious and courtly. But it is all veneer. They are what my father would have called "hollow".'

'You don't care then——'

Dora hesitated. It seemed absurd, after what Randle had said, to suggest that he might, after all, have a tender feeling for Lady Muriel Ava-

lon. Perhaps if she had known of a certain bunch of forget-me-nots that her cousin kept hidden away in a private drawer at home she might have thought differently.

‘I see what you are driving at, Dora,’ he went on, with a laugh. ‘You think, because I was instrumental in saving a girl’s life, I ought to fall in love with her. That is the way in novels, perhaps ; but novels are one thing, real life is another. You are too romantic, coz.’

‘And you are too matter-of-fact. It would have been so very nice, you know.’

‘Nice ! to fall in love with a girl that I shall very likely never see again, and who would not have me, or be allowed to have me, if I were to ask her. Besides, a lady with a handle to her name is not a right sort of wife for a plain manufacturer. But I think it is now my turn to ask you a question or two. Are you sure that nobody—no sturdy Switzer or fascinating Frenchman—has stolen your heart, Cousin Dora ?’

‘I should just like to hear you put that question to Mademoiselle Vieutemps, Ran. She would resent the mere suggestion of such a possibility as a foul libel on her establishment.

Nobody has stolen my heart yet, cousin, and that is a more straightforward answer than you gave me,' returned Dora, who had an uneasy sense of not having obtained quite all the information she desired.

'What is the matter, I wonder? Why, they are coming back.'

This seemingly irrelevant observation was caused by the appearance of Robert Ryvington and William Bellasis, who were making towards them—apparently in great haste—from the direction of Chatburn.

'Why have you come back, Bob? Nothing wrong, I hope,' said Randle when they met, as in a few minutes they did.

'I am sorry to say there is,' answered Bob, who was evidently much agitated. 'There has been an accident.'

'Nothing serious, I hope. Is anybody hurt?'

'Yes, but not seriously—not fatally, I mean,' said Bob, looking earnestly at his cousin.

'Is it my father or my brother?' asked Dora, with trembling lips. She had rightly interpreted Bob's look.

'Your father; but I hope it is nothing very

bad. He got knocked down by a brewer's cart as he was crossing the road to the Abbey grounds.'

'Was he run over?' asked Randle.

'No, only thrown down by the shaft; but the horses were going at a trot, and the fall was a bad one. He could not speak at first, but he seemed to be coming round a bit when we left.'

'Is my brother there?' inquired Dora, faintly.

'No, he went off for a doctor first thing. He thought it would be better than sending a messenger.'

'Oh, this is terrible,' cried the poor girl, as the tears ran down her cheeks. 'And to happen on Robert's birthday, too, when we were all so happy. It is terrible. Poor papa! Let us go on, please, as fast as we can.'

'Do not distress yourself, Dora,' said Randle, gently. 'It may not be so bad as you think. I do not gather from Bob that your father is very badly hurt—that he has any bones broken, for instance—has he, Bob?'

'I do not think so. Do you think he has, Mr. Bellasis?'

'I am sure not. I helped to carry him in.

He is slightly cut about the head—scratched, rather—for the wounds are quite superficial. But he was stunned, you know, and I daresay rather badly shaken; that is the worst, so far as I am aware.’

‘ You hear, Dora. Nothing worse than a bad shake. There is nothing to fear. I have no doubt that, with careful nursing, uncle will be all right again by to-morrow, or at any rate in a few days.’

Notwithstanding this expression of confidence, Randle was not without fear that, to a man of his uncle’s years and habits, the consequences of a ‘ bad shake ’ might be very grave.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE RANDLE LESS.

AN excited, chattering crowd had gathered before the inn door. Everybody was telling everybody else how the mishap had come to pass, and there were naturally almost as many versions as individuals. The great point of contention was whether Mr. Ryvington had been knocked down by a brewer's cart or a butcher's van. One gossip averred that a railway lorry had done the mischief, another laid the blame on a carriage and pair. As to the extent and nature of Mr. Ryvington's injuries opinions were equally conflicting: some had it that his head was cut open, and that he had sustained a compound fracture of the thigh; others asserted that both arms were broken, one

so badly that it would have to be amputated. The suggestion of a sceptical shoemaker that 't'owd gentlemon was nobbut in a bit of a faant,' and that 'a glass or two of brandy would bring him raand directly,' was received with general indignation; and the rebuke of the clogger's wife (the originator of the compound fracture theory), that it was 'the most unfeelingest saying as she had ever heard come out of a man's mouth,' was warmly applauded.

When Dora and Randle appeared the clamour was instantly hushed, and as they walked swiftly towards the inn door all respectfully made way for them.

They found Mr. Ryvington in a room on the ground floor. He was lying on a sofa, with closed eyes; and his pallor, and the black court-plaister with which his cuts had been dressed, gave him a look so ghastly that Dora was almost startled into a scream. The rustle of her dress, or the creaking of the door, attracted his attention, and he opened his eyes. When he saw Dora he smiled. This made him look more natural, and, recovering herself, she went forward and kissed him.

‘Dear papa,’ she said, ‘I am so very, very sorry. Are you much hurt—have you pain?’

‘A little, child; but perhaps when the doctor comes he will be able to do something for me. Kiss me again, dear.’

This was so tenderly spoken that Dora could hardly restrain her tears.

‘Can I do anything for you, papa dear?’

‘I do not think you can, child. Your aunt’ (looking towards Mrs. Ryvington, who was the only person in the room besides themselves) ‘is very kind, and has done all that was possible. I am pretty comfortable, thank you. But if you would leave Randle and me alone a few minutes I should be very glad.’

As the door closed behind them the expression of cheerfulness which the stricken man had put on in his daughter’s presence gave place to one of pain and misgiving.

‘What is it, uncle?’ said Randle, anxiously; ‘do you feel worse?’

‘Not worse just now, but no better. I am done for this time, Randle, lad.’

‘Nonsense, uncle; you must not talk in that way. You will live many a year yet. You are

only a little shook. You have no bones broken, you know.'

'But I am afraid I have something broken here,' (pressing his hand to his side). 'I feel it; something tells me I am not long for this world. And I am not easy in my mind, Randle.'

'Can I do anything for you,—anything to make your mind easier?'

'Thank you kindly,' said the old man, plaintively. 'You were always good and kind, Randle. I only wish others were more like you. It is about my will, Randle. I fear much I have made a foolish will,—that it may lead to trouble, especially for Dora. It opens a man's eyes when he gets his death-stroke, as I have got mine.'

'Not so bad as that, uncle, I hope. You must keep up your courage, you know. That is half the battle. We shall have the doctor here soon, and he will tell you that you are quite mistaken. But about this will; can it not be altered?'

'That is what I want to talk to you about. I want you to telegraph for Pleasington to

come over by the first train ; there may perhaps be time.'

'Yes, uncle ; I will go at once.'

'Wait a minute. Don't tell anybody ; above all, don't tell your cousin Randle. When Pleasington comes let him be shown in here at once, and send everybody else out of the room. Till then, not a word. And, Randle, I have made you one of my executors. You will act, won't you ?'

'Certainly, uncle, if it will give you any satisfaction.'

'It will, it will. And if so be that—that this will cannot be altered, you will do your best for Dora. You will not let her be put upon in any way, I mean.'

'I don't know altogether what you mean, uncle ; but so far as it depends on me she shall not be put upon by anybody. Of that I give you my word. I will watch over her interests as if she were my own sister.'

'Thank you, Randle ; thank you. I wish my own lad had been more like you. But go and send that message to Pleasington. I acted

against his advice in making my will as I did, but I would not heed him. I see now, though. It is not a right will, and may lead to trouble. But go—time presses—and send Dora and your mother here.’

When the two women re-entered the room, Mr. Ryvington asked his daughter to sit beside him. Then he took her hand in his and closed his eyes. Mrs. Ryvington, who was an experienced nurse, noticed with alarm that his paleness had increased, and that his voice was weaker; but Dora thought that her father seemed more tranquil, and therefore better.

As Randle returned from despatching his telegram to the lawyer, a two-horse drag was driven at a fast trot to the inn door. His cousin had brought a doctor—a grey-haired old gentleman—who was at once conducted into the patient’s room. His first proceeding, after asking a few questions, was to request the ladies to withdraw for a minute or two. Then, while the two Randles looked on, he made a careful examination of Mr. Ryvington’s body and limbs.

‘You are right,’ he said, when the inspection

was over, turning to Deep Randle. 'No bones are broken, nor is there much internal injury. It is a case in which a surgeon is almost powerless—one of nervous shock. We can look for cure only to time, good nursing, suitable diet, and perhaps a course of tonics. At present the quieter Mr. Ryvington can be kept the better.'

'You do not think it would be safe to take him home, then?' asked Deep Randle.

The surgeon shook his head and looked very grave.

'Not at present, certainly,' he said. 'I think the ladies might come in now.'

As Dora and Mrs. Ryvington returned, the doctor left the room, remarking, with a significant glance at the two Randles, that he would be back in a few minutes.

Both the young men followed him.

'Well,' said Deep Randle, as soon as they were outside, 'what is your opinion, doctor? Do you think there is any danger?'

'I am afraid there is considerable danger. Your father has a weak heart; the shock to the system has been very great; and—I always like to be plain in cases of this sort—if he does

not rally very speedily you must prepare for the worst.'

'But can nothing be done? Cannot you give him something.'

'I am going to do. We must try stimulants. But tell me first, please, what have been your father's habits. I mean has he taken much wine or spirits?'

'No, I do not think you can say he has taken much; that is, not too much. He drinks half a bottle of port, sometimes a whole one, with his dinner.'

'And takes a nightcap, I suppose?'

'Yes, he generally takes a glass or two of brandy and water before going to bed.'

'I feared so. Well, we can only do our best; but I should be doing wrong if I encouraged you to look for a favourable issue. But I must now return to my patient and give some instructions.'

'This is terrible. I did not expect this. The doctor means that it is impossible for my father to get better—that he must die,' said Deep Randle to his cousin.

He looked much distressed, as, indeed, he

was; for although his own interest was always his first consideration, and he had often thought of the day when he should receive his inheritance and become master of Deepdene, contemplating the possibility of his father's demise with perfect equanimity, the stroke had come so unexpectedly that he felt completely unmanned. Now that he was about to lose his father, he recognized for the first time how much he owed him, how kind he had been, how he had schemed and striven to raise his family to a higher social position; and he remembered, not without remorse, that he had not always rendered him that respect which was his due—had openly sneered at his old-fashioned ways, his closeness in money matters, and even his educational deficiencies.

‘Terrible indeed. I do not think the doctor expects him to live many hours,’ observed Red Randle, who was surprised at his cousin’s evidently genuine emotion. He had not given him credit for so much feeling.

‘Do you know anything about his will?’ asked the other, after a short pause.

This was rather an embarrassing question.

Randle disliked concealing the fact of his having sent for the lawyer; yet he did not feel that it would be right to disobey his uncle's injunction to keep it from his cousin's knowledge. So he was constrained to do the thing he most disliked—dissemble.

‘Only that he has made a will, and that I am to be one of the executors. I thought you knew all about it.’

‘Hardly so much as you know yourself. I was not aware, for instance, that you were to be one of the executors.’

This was said with a slight tinge of bitterness, as if the news did not altogether please him. The first shock over, Deep Randle's grief was already giving place to an anxious curiosity as to the tenor of his father's testamentary dispositions.

‘I was not aware myself until half an hour ago.’

‘Will you act?’

‘That is a strange question at such a moment as this. I have no ambition that way, I assure you. An executorship is about the most thankless office a man can have. But I can give you an

answer. I promised my uncle that I would act, and I shall keep my word.'

'I do not think you will find the office a thankless one so far as Dora and I are concerned, Ran,' said the other, to whom it had just occurred that, as his cousin was appointed and determined to act, it might be as well to keep on good terms with him. 'And there will be very little to do. It will not be like winding up a manufacturer's business, you know. The principal thing will be the investment of my sister's fortune, and that, I make no doubt, is made a charge on the estate.'

'That I know nothing about,' returned Red Randle, coldly. 'But don't you think our place just now is in your father's room? The doctor evidently thinks he may not survive the day.'

'Yes, let us go,' answered the other, annoyed as well at his cousin's rebuke as at his own failure to illicit information from him; for, in spite of his denial, he was convinced that Randle knew all about the will.

The surgeon's prognosis of the probable result of Mr. Ryvington's accident was realized even more speedily than he had anticipated. In less

than an hour after his arrival, Mr. Ryvington passed away, so quietly and painlessly that Dora and the two Randles thought he had sunk into a deep sleep, and it was only when Mr. Thyme placed his hand on his patient's heart and said, 'It is all over,' that they knew their father and uncle was no more.

Amid the solemn silence that followed the surgeon's words, Dora bent reverently over the dead man's face and touched the cold forehead with her trembling lips. Then she knew that her father was gone from her for ever, that in this life they could never meet again, and her heart seemed dead within her. In his lifetime she had not been blind to her father's faults. What child is? But at this solemn moment she remembered only that he was her father, and that he had loved her as she had loved him. And there fell upon her a foreboding that, as his death had brought her trouble, so it might bring her evil, and that the brightness of her young life would be buried in her father's grave.

Her brother, too, in that supreme moment, was conscious only that he had lost a father.

Death for a while banished every thought of self. He forgot even that the event to which he had so long looked forward had at last come to pass, and that he was now master of Deepdene and £10,000 a year, with full liberty to shape his life according to his liking.

But this abnegation was not of long duration, and jealousy of his sister and cousin, and an uneasy doubt as to the provisions of the will, despite his father's assurances that they were in his favour, began speedily to assert themselves—doubts that were far from being allayed by an incident which occurred shortly after his father's demise. As he and the other Randle left the chamber of death they met Lawyer Pleasington, looking very hurried and disturbed.

‘Am I in time?’ he asked of Red Randle. ‘I started the moment I got your telegram. How is your uncle going on?’

‘I am sorry to say my uncle died half an hour ago.’

‘Dear me, dear me, it's a thousand pities; but I set off the moment I received your telegram, and if there had not been a train on the

point of starting I could not have got here for an hour or more.'

'What telegram?' exclaimed Deep Randle, to whom this conversation was altogether enigmatical. 'What does it all mean?'

'I telegraphed for Mr. Pleasington at your father's request,' said the other. 'He wanted him to make some alterations in his will, and he particularly desired that I should not mention the circumstance to anybody, not even to you.'

'I——' began Deep Randle, angrily, and then, restrained doubtless by prudential considerations, he stopped short; but his look said as plainly as words could say, 'I don't believe you.'

'What alterations did he want to make, Mr. Pleasington?' he asked, after a short pause.

'That is more than I can tell you.'

'Can you guess, then?'

'It is against my principles to guess, Mr. Randle.'

'But his present will—you made it—is it all in order?'

'Perfectly.'

‘And valid?’

‘Of course.’

‘What is its purport?’

‘That I am not at liberty to say. But you will not have to restrain your curiosity long Mr. Ryvington,’ said the lawyer, sarcastically, recognising for the first time the young man’s accession to the headship of the family. ‘On the day your father is buried you will be fully enlightened.’

This answer did not seem to give Deep Randle much satisfaction, and, after remarking that he had several pressing matters to attend to, he left Mr. Pleasington and his cousin to themselves.

CHAPTER XXV.

MRS. RYVINGTON AND HER NIECE.

‘**I**F it could only have been ; if it could only have been ; if even yet it might please the Lord to bring it about !’ And then Mrs. Ryvington stopped short, as if afraid of going any further, or, perhaps, to watch the effect of this rather enigmatical utterance on Dora, who, by her own wish, was staying at Redscar until after the funeral.

‘If what could only have been, aunt ?’ asked Dora, with wondering eyes, still red with weeping.

‘Oh, Dora, my love, it will be lonely for you in yon big house, all by yourself, for your brother will be often away, and your aunt Ford is not much company for one of your age.

And if the estate is left to him, as I daresay it is, you may have no right to live there.'

'You surely do not think Randle would turn me out of the house, mother? And I am sure dear papa will have left us both alike. Am I not as much his child as my brother?'

'As far as that goes, yes; and I think parents should make no difference between one child and another. But everybody does not think so, and your poor father, I know, wanted to keep Deepdene in the family. He is almost sure to have entailed it, and, even if you lived there for the present, Randle might marry, you know, and then what would you do?'

'Oh, aunt, you are too anxious. I cannot think about such things at present. I am sure poor papa will have arranged everything for the best; and he once told me that he had promised mamma to leave us both alike.'

'If it could only have been; if it could only have been,' exclaimed Mrs. Ryvington, again with a heavy sigh, and a look as dolorous as if she, not Dora, had been left an orphan.

'How mysterious you are, aunt,' said Dora

smiling in spite of her sorrow. 'If what could only have been?'

'If it might have pleased the Lord to make you one of us.'

'But am I not one of you already? We are all Ryvingtons, you know,' answered Dora, quite unable to conjecture what her aunt was driving at. 'Tell me plainly what you mean, for I am sure I shall never guess.'

'That if it might please the Lord in His goodness to bring you and my son Randle together the great wish of my life would be realised.'

'Oh!'

For a few minutes nothing more was said. Mrs. Ryvington was watching anxiously for some indication of the effect of her words, while Dora seemed to be thinking how she should reply.

'Does—does Randle know of this?' she said at length.

'Not at all, Dora. He has not the least suspicion that I have any such wish. You may think it strange that I have chosen this time,

when your poor dear father is lying dead, to moot such a matter to you. But it seemed to me, seeing that the Lord has taken away your only parent, that it might comfort you to look forward to having a house of your own, and living where your father and mother lived and you were born.'

'You forget, aunt, that I have no right to look forward to any such thing. I have always looked upon Randle as a dear brother, and I am sure he has never thought of me in any other light than as a sister.'

'But if so be——'

'You are mistaken, aunt, I am sure. Randle and I are brother and sister, and I do not think we shall ever be anything else. And' (hesitatingly) 'it seems hardly right to discuss such a subject now. Let us talk about something else.'

Mrs. Ryvington was far from being dissatisfied with this answer. The question was, as it were, left open, and Dora had said nothing to indicate that she would refuse Randle if Randle at some future time should ask her to be his

wife. Meanwhile the matter had been laid before her. She could not help thinking about it if she would. Mrs. Ryvington knew, moreover, that when the heart is softened by a great sorrow, we crave more for sympathy, and are more thankful for any manifestation of it than at other times; and nothing could exceed the kindness and delicacy of Randle's attentions to his cousin since her bereavement, attentions which left as little doubt in his mother's mind that his love for Dora was more than the love of a brother as that they were exceedingly grateful to the young lady herself.

As Mrs. Rivington had told her niece, a marriage between her and Randle had long been one of her day-dreams. She honestly thought they were well suited to each other, and would make each other happy; and, as a woman who knew the value of money, she was fully alive to the advantage her son would derive from marrying a girl with so large a fortune as Dora would be sure to possess.

In the evening she mentioned the matter to

Randle. She thought it might be expedient to put the idea into his mind also, if peradventure it were not there already.

‘Poor Dora,’ she began; ‘it will be very lonely for her at Deepdene. Her aunt Ford is no company for anybody. When the funeral is over and everything settled she will feel the loss of her father more than ever.’

‘She will, indeed, poor girl,’ answered Randle, pityingly. ‘But we must have her often. She is always pleased to come to Redscar. I have heard her say she feels more at home here than at Deepdene.’

‘I am afraid that cannot be, Randle. You forget that Dora is now a woman. People would talk.’

‘What would they talk about? Let them talk,’ exclaimed Randle, who had a great contempt for what he called ‘twaddle,’ meaning thereby gossip and scandal.

‘It is very easy for you to despise talk, but Dora would probably be less indifferent. Suppose they said she came here to see you?’

‘Suppose they did, what then?’

‘Dear me, Randle, how obtuse you are! Would you like it to be said of Dora that she came here to look for a husband?’

‘Oh, that is it, is it?’

‘Yes, that is it. Has no such idea ever occurred to you?’

‘What, that Dora came here to look for a husband?’

‘No, you know what I mean. Has the thought that you might do worse than make her your wife never occurred to you?’

‘Honestly, mother, it never has. I have always looked upon Dora as a sister, and the idea of marrying her, now you mention it, seems to me positively unnatural.’

‘Perhaps when you have thought a little more about it, it may seem less so. And oh, Randle, nothing would please me more than to see you and Dora united.’

‘Has Dora any such idea, do you think?’ asked Randle, sharply.

‘That is more than I can say; but I almost think so. I think if you were to ask her she would not say you nay.’

‘I hope you are wrong; mother. I should be

sorry to think that Dora's feeling for me is other than sisterly, for great as is my affection for her it falls far short of the love a man ought to have for the woman he means to marry, I have a warm brotherly love for her, but nothing more.'

'The more would come in time, Randle. At any rate, think about it.'

'You put it in such a way that I cannot help thinking about it, mother. I shall think about it a great deal, though perhaps not in the sense you desire.'

And he did. As he said, the idea of being more than a brother to Dora in affection, or a cousin in fact, had never entered his mind, and, as it seemed to him, there was no particular reason why he should make haste to marry—either her or anybody else. But if his mother were right in her conjecture that Dora loved him, that she had misinterpreted his attentions, the matter would wear an entirely different aspect. For he liked her so well that he would have been deeply grieved to know that she cherished an unrequited love, and he admitted to himself that if he should resolve to marry he could not find anywhere a better or more suit-

able wife than Dora. True, he could not offer her that higher love, that thorough devotion of heart and mind which are the tokens of a great passion; but these, as his mother had suggested, might come with time.

And then he thought of Lady Muriel, of her last words of farewell, and of the bunch of forget-me-nots which he still kept hidden away in one of the drawers of his writing-table. Long past as the time was, the thought almost made him tremble. The passion that he lacked for Dora he could, had circumstances been propitious, have felt for Lady Muriel—had almost felt indeed. But the rubs of time had already dulled the vividness of the impression she had made upon him, and if the memory of their meeting and parting came back to him, as it sometimes did, he would thrust it aside, with a smile at his own folly for allowing his thoughts to dwell on one who could never be his and whom he might never see again.

As for Dora, there was no need for a present decision. Even if he should come to the resolution which his mother so evidently desired, it

would not be seemly to broach the matter for some time after Mr. Ryvington's funeral. Meanwhile he would watch his cousin and try to find out if his mother's surmise as to the nature of her affection for him had any foundation in fact.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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